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No. 3.

Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot of the West.

A WILD LIFE ROMANCE, BY "BUCKSKIN SAM."



KIT CARSON, JR.

N. ORR - Co.

Kit Carson, Jr.,

The Crack Shot of the West.

A ROMANCE OF THE LONE STAR STATE.

BY MAJOR S. S. HALL,
[BUCKSKIN SAM.]

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CHAPTER I.

THE PRAIRIE RANGERS.

The sharpen'd ear, the piercing eye,
The quick resolve in danger nigh;
The speed that in the fight or chase,
Outstripped the Charib's rapid race,
The steady brain, the sinewy limb
To leap, to climb, to dive, to swim;
The iron frame inured to bear
Each dire inclemency of air,
Nor less confirmed to undergo
Fatigue's faint chill, and famine's thro.

My first scene opens half-way between Oakville and San Patricio, near the boundary line of Live Oak County, and at the Nueces ford.

The date—1860, when the American press was engaged commenting on the probabilities of a civil war, and little space was given for items from the Texas frontiers.

The characters and names are of those who have lived or are now living. The incidents are unrecorded historical events that have come under my own personal observation; and I will say to those who so honor me, by following my ink-trail, that I shall, in this story, depict frontier life as it is, in the chaparrals and on the prairies of the far Southwest—shall use no character who is not well known to myself, and to all old residents of that section of the country in which the scenes are laid.

The Southern sun was just dipping in the west, its bright rays filtering through the branches of the live-oaks, causing the long festoons of Spanish moss to cast strange shadows upon the sward, when a cavalcade of scouts, their mustangs weary and panting, slowly worked their way down the steep, treacherous bank of the Nueces river, and buried their noses, eyes deep, in the cool waters.

Among these scouts are some who have made themselves famous, not only in Texas but throughout the United States.

The magnificent man in front, with long, flowing hair, ruddy cheeks, and commanding mien, is Captain John Donaldson, a nephew of Senator Wigfall.

Next behind, running his fingers caressingly through the mane of his wiry mustang, is Lieut. Cole McRay, almost a giant in stature, a bitter hater of everything pertaining to Reds or Greasers.

The other three personages of our party are Reckless Joe, Texas Bill, and Bill Mann of Helena—the latter a noted scout under Capt. Littleton; the two former having just returned from the Indian war, under Capt. Edward Burleson. All these are well known through Texas for noble deeds of daring.

These five Texans are clad in buckskin, fringed, and beautifully embroidered, with red silk sashes twisted around the heavy leather belts, and dangling their long fringes at each side. The belts, with heavy silver clasps—upon which the star of Texas is heavily engraved—supporting two large-sized Colt's revolvers, and a long bowie-knife; a Sharpe's carbine hangs with the lariat at the horn of the saddle; blankets, tin cup, and canteen, on the cantel behind, show that the men are used to "roughing it," and prepared to defend themselves against odds.

They presented, as seated upon their mustangs in the deep shadows of the live oaks, a sight that would have made a score of Greasers hunt their hole in the chaparrals, and cause their yellow cheeks to pale with fright.

But, we will listen to the conversation of these Rangers, and learn more of them and their present object.

"I say, Cap," said "Reckless Joe," "how much farther do you call it to Banketta Creek? I'm about played myself, and my nag kinder hankers after a rest. I know by the way he has stumbled, the last league. The very blood within me seems to run sluggishly, and me eyelids seem to have lost their grip. I was on the last watch, last night, and in fact have slumbered but little since leaving San Antonio."

NOTE TO READERS.—It will be observed that my characters speak fair English at times, and at others use nothing but slang and clipped words. This is true. Among frontiersmen are some who have fair education, but when they are on the plains they get into the habit of using the same language as those who have no education, and it comes easier, and they get the name of putting on airs if they throw out words which cannot be generally understood.

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"It is about two leagues from this ford, Joe," said Capt. Donaldson, "but, don't let your horses drink too much now; they can take their fill at the creek. We'll jog along easy the remainder of the way. We will be sure to find the rest of the boys encamped there, and they will be expecting us, for we organize to-morrow night. Bill, I want to send you down to Patricio in the morning, bright and early, for ammunition—that is, if you will have recovered from our forced march."

"You just bet your last rial, I'm on hand, Cap., every time, for anything that will hasten our march toward the Rio Grande. I reckon I'll spile if I don't get a shot at some of them Greasers soon," answered Bill Mann.

"Don't be too anxious," said Donaldson. "Cortina has a big crowd with him, this time. They say he has all of seven hundred men, and he must have a formidable force, to invade a State, and burn and pillage the ranches for a hundred miles up, from the Reinosa ford."

"But, we'll give him a histe, if Old Rip Ford takes the lead, with our crowd," added Mat Nolans, "and we will drive the greasy cut-throats and thieves into the river, and if they come out safe on the Mexican side, why, we'll follow them on their own ground. We've got to teach this Chaparral Fox a lesson that he will remember, or stock-raising won't pay between the Nueces and the Bravo."

"Come on, boys! Come on!" said Reckless Joe. "Me soul is up in arms and eager for the fray, but, at the same time, I'm on the anxious seat, in regard to corn-pone, dried-beef, and coffee. Old Sol, the glorious orb of day, has traversed the blue vault of heaven in most majestic splendor, to-day, I must admit, but I think we could have dispensed with some of the splendor, without any inconvenience, and I'm not sorry he is now smiling upon the long-tailed denizens of the Chinese Empire. But I really like this part of the country. Had it not been for the live-oaks we should not have been able to travel during the middle of the day. Now, boys, if some of these oak-mottes were only scattered permissons-like on the prairies, we should not have had such rough times after the reds.

"That's so, Joe; but, we can't have things as we want them in this world, or the next either, for that matter," put in Texas Bill; "and we must not find fault with the Lone Star State, when we know it contains within its boundaries all kinds of soil, hill and dale, prairie and woodland, and a person can suit himself in locating. We have area enough for half a dozen kingdoms, and can ride a thousand miles in a direct line without crossing our boundary."

During this conversation our scouts had gained the south side of the Nueces, rested their mustangs a short time, and headed toward Banketta Creek, which empties into the Nueces, (River of Nuts) below the ford, which the Rangers had crossed.

With the reader's permission we will dash ahead and take glance at the Ranger camp for which our scouts are marching.

Just three miles above the little town of Banketta, which boasted at this time of one blacksmith's-shop, three grocery-stores, or bar-rooms, one billiard table, not exactly on the square, and half a dozen rough dwellings, was located the camp and rendezvous of the Rangers, who were organizing and fitting out against Cortina, the most successful bandit that ever invaded Texas, not excepting Cannales or Christophe Rubio.

At this time Cortina was in command of the largest force of Mexican outlaws that had been on Texas soil since her annexation to the United States.

His followers were of the lowest order of Mexicans, escaped peons, ladrones, and outlaws, whose acts of barbarity had sent a thrill of horror up and down the Rio Grande, and a wild, pleading cry for ranger protection had run through the land; hence the gathering of Rangers and scouts, under orders from Sam Houston, Governor and Father of Texas.

As some of our readers may not be aware that real slavery still exists on the American continent, I will say a word in regard to the peon system of Mexico, that has been the means of recruiting the outlaw gangs.

Under Mexican laws a person can pass from a citizen to that of a peon; from being the debtor of another he is made to occupy a position differing but slightly from the condition of a slave. The difference is simply this: The slave can be transferred, for a given consideration, from one owner to another, while the peon can exchange masters only by an assignment of the debt he owes. The redemption of a peon from his obligation, however, is an event far less likely to occur than a slave's escape from bondage. The Rio Grande is the El Dorado of the runaway peon. There he makes war on both sides of the river, retreating to the opposite side as the one he chances to make his camp becomes too hot for him.

But we will now return to the Ranger camp, on the banks of Banketta Creek.

It is night, and the camp presents to the eye of an observer, a scene so wild and extremely romantic, that were the person from the States

(as they say in Texas), he would not know he was within the confines of the American Republic, but would think himself dreaming over some of the many scenes so faithfully painted by Rembrandt. A dozen camp-fires burned brightly, casting their brilliant, pointed rays through the branches of the oaks, flickering through the masses of Spanish moss—rich draperies for nature's chambers.

By the trunks of these trees lean rifles of every make and caliber, and hanging from the branches are saddles, bridles, lariats, horns, pouches, canteens and tin cups, with all the accoutrements of war pertaining to man and beast—each and every article ready to slip from its twig for immediate use in case of sudden alarm.

Serapes, with all the brilliant colors of the rainbow, woven in their centers and borders, lay scattered around the camp.

Gathered around the fires, cooking, eating, smoking and joking, are three score of rough, buckskinned sons of the Lone Star State, their features bronzed by the Southern sun, and a thousand camp-fires, and now glowing in the light, which showed off their muscular, symmetrical forms, standing, or reclining in every position, their hearty laughter or loud halloo ringing out on the night air.

Just out from the timber, on the prairie, here and there picketed, cropping the long, rich grass, are full a hundred mustangs and mules, and beyond these a line of scouts, flat on the ground, so as to easily observe the approach of any persons, friend or foe, from the prairie to the east and south, which stretches level and unbroken to the horizon, which can not now be distinguished—earth and sky so blending together. I will here state that a Ranger on guard does not walk post, as in the army, for he could be easily picked off, or evaded by an Indian, who crawls up to a camp to reconnoiter, at times rising up like a ghost, to spy out the position. The Ranger has the advantage in a prairie country, for he can see the Indian (on most nights in the South) outlined against the sky, he, the Ranger, being upon the ground in a reclining position. He would, if walking, give the Indian his exact position, who could crawl up in the grass near his beat, jump out, and knife or tomahawk him in the back without alarming the camp.

It is necessary for me to digress, at times, from my story to give the reader information in frontier affairs and customs, which I have not seen explained in other works of like character.

In the Ranger camp—which I have described—flitting from fire to fire, or seated by tree-trunks, smoking their corn-cob pipes, are men who had lost their dearest ones on earth by Reds or Greasers—men who ask for no quarter and give none, only in rare instances—men who would gladly miss a day's grub, or night's rest, for a shot at either of these enemies of the Southern border. Leaning against a tree in the foreground, are two men directly opposite in character, yet both equally hate the Indian and Mexican.

One is the giant borderman, Big Foot Wallace—with whom I have scouted on many a trail—as reserved, in fact morose, as ever. Will he ever recover from the massacre of his family? No. As long as he breathes he will fight for vengeance!

The little wiry fellow at his feet, his tongue running like a New England shuttle, is Jim Bearfield, who will shed a tear of pity at the suffering of another, and the next minute fight like a fiend.

Both men are always ready when needed for hot work, with lead or steel.

But, what is this sudden commotion in camp? Men upon the ground leap to their feet and run for their rifles; revolvers are drawn quickly from scabbards; horses and mules are snorting, and the guard calling one to another.

A clattering of hoofs from toward Banketta town—a wild, piercing, horrible yell—comes at intervals toward the camp, from out the inky blackness, or what seems so to the eyes which have been looking at the fires.

A single horseman is soon seen through the border of light thrown out from the camp. He is without a hat, his long hair flying like a Comanche's, his horse reeking with sweat, white with foam; the animal's mouth is wide open, dripping blood, and its eyes glaring with a pleading look almost human in their agony.

What is the meaning of this awful sight? What is that which flashes in the light, in the hand of the rider, and descends backward? Has he an enemy—a panther upon the horse?

All gaze paralyzed, open-mouthed, at this strange horse and rider coming thundering into camp.

All give way; he pauses not, but with horrible yells, his bowie-knife rising high into the air, and descending into the poor beast's hams, which are dripping white foam and red gore.

Horse and rider, the former in a staggering gallop, showing weakness, are seen but a moment, leaping over fires and every thing in the way; then both vanish into the darkness, beyond the camp, and up the creek—the wild, maniac yells of the rider piercing the ears of all who hear, and making their very blood to chill in their veins.

With blanched faces, the Rangers gaze at each other—those who pale not when lead flies like hail, and blood flows in streams; and through the camp, from lip to lip, goes the words:

"Wild Will!"*

CHAPTER II.

WILD WILL.

Alone and with a madman's zeal
That horseman plied the scourge and steel;
And jaded now, and spent with dread,
Embossed with foam, and red with blood,
But stumbling in the rugged dell,
The tortured horse exhausted fell.
The maddened rider strove in vain
To rouse him with the knife and rein,
But the good steed, his labors o'er,
Stretched his stiff limbs, to rise no more.

WHO that was on the Rio Grande during the Cortina wars, that did not see or hear of "Wild Will," the maniac of the chaparrals?

Was there a curse upon him? None knew positively his history. Some said his wife and children were all murdered, scalped, and otherwise mutilated, while he was absent, and that he was the first to discover his great loss—the first to come upon their mangled remains.

Since this horrible event he had been a wanderer—a lone scout upon the plains, never letting an Indian escape him when he once struck a trail.

At most times, in appearance, he was as sane as any man, but never communicative; in fact, would grow furious, when questioned in regard to his past history.

When he wandered into a settlement, and could get rum—the greatest curse of mankind, on the plaza, or on the plain, one of his mad fits was sure to follow, and then the poor animal he rode was doomed.

No man dare interfere with him in his insane rides, when he had the horrible habit of gashing his horse on the run, until the poor beast would fall dead with fright, and loss of blood, for all shrunk from using violence to one known to be insane.

He often charged into, and made his way through, war-parties of Indians, who shrunk in horror from his insane, maddened eyes, and cowered in terror from the "Phantom of the Plains."

To see Wild Will when he was wild, was considered by a many a plainsman to be an omen of evil, and many a Ranger after the thunderbolt-like passage of this man or devil, through camp, wore a troubled look; few words were spoken, and these in subdued voices, as they sat around the fires.

"I'd a blamed sight rather see the devil, horns, hoofs, and tail, any time, than Will," said Tom Clark to Jim Bearfield, as they sat some distance from their fire, on their blankets, ready spread for their night's comfort.

"You're just right, Tom; the devil must be a respectable-looking person compared with Will, when on the rampage. The cursed whisky-sellers in Banketta ought to be h'isted up a limb for letting him have what they know 'll knock what little sense he's got out'en his poor head. I hain't seen him afore for six months; then he was up at fort Ewell, calm and peaceful, with six fresh scalps hangin' to his belt. Now, that's business, and if the grocery-keepers and sutlers would just keep whisky from him, why he'd do a heap to'ards thinnin' out the Comanches, say nothin' of a loose Kioway or Lipau, once in a while."

"Well, Jim, let's knock off on Will. I kinder don't care to talk of him. Thar's sumthin' so devish about ther cuss, that it spiles my appetite, and that won't do, for when that's gone, good-by, Tom! I'm just as sure that's bad luck ahead for me, as I am that that's snakes in a dog-town, an' that ain't a mule on King's ranch that could set me back more, with both hind huffs squar' at me, than this thing. I don't say I wish I was in San Antonio, fur I don't balk at nothin' but I feel kinder squeamish about the gills. I ain't afear'd o' nothin' human, but ther wasn't nothin' human about the look Will gi'n me as he went past, his horse's tail hissin' like a whip-snake on the migrate."

I'll go you a slugz that Will will follow us when we get on the march, an' be in when ther fight comes off, an' if he does, why them Greasers 'll just wilt, an' won't have strength enough to git up an' dust, what's alive an' able to do so, when he shows himself; but yer gitin' blue, pard, an' we'll change the subject, as Doc Dossell said, when he went for the horse-thief's corpus, an' found a musquite log in the box, but, changing the subject cost Doc a basket of wine over at Captain Immeke's, you bet!"

"Don't talk! Don't sling yer tongue about wine here, in this dry section, or yer'll set me on ther back trail, Jim. I believe I could put myself outside of a pint of Mexican muzcal, as bad as I hate a Mexican, an' as awful as ther tarnul stuff smells! It's a cheap way of gettin' drunk, that Rio Grande whisky, for yer bound ter stay drunk a week, frum the fust day's pourin' down, but you'll feel mighty weak fur sum time arter

*An actual occurrence, in every particular.
**\$50 gold piece.

that.—What the devil's that, pard? Wild Will ag'in?"

As Tom Clark made the last remark, in a hurried tone of voice, the Texan yell rung out on the night air, given by our friends, the scouts we left at Nueces ford, now just coming into camp.

The whole camp was now in an uproar; those who had rolled themselves in their blankets sprung from them, to greet, with a hearty cheer, their fellow-scouts and captain. An answering yell from the whole company rung out over the plain, as the captain and his four companions rode within the circle of lights.

"Welcome! Welcome, boys! to Banketta Creek!"

"Huray for Cap Donaldson and the Chaparals!"

"Viva Capitan! Bueno Comandante!"

Such cries rung on the air from healthy lungs, and true hearts beat with pleasure; the very draperies of Spanish moss above the heads of the Rangers quivered like aspens as the cries of welcome shook the air.

Such a greeting can only be imagined by those who live in cities and towns.

Ready hands assisted to groom the tired mustangs, and picket them on the prairie, while the newly-arrived scouts lost no time in their urgent inquiries in regard to the state of the commissariat.

"Give me a mule," said Reckless Joe; "my kingdom for a b'il'd mule, and if you haven't that article of food upon yer bill-o'-fare, just sling-a-long a brace of broiled buzzards, a stewed coyote, and a dessert of prickly pears, washed down with good square drink from Chock-a-late Creek; but mind you, pick out the bugs and singe the buzzards!"

"Joe, if I wasn't mighty hungry—you might say starving—you'd turn my stomach with your disgustin' way of servin' up grub, that wouldn't do to feed a Greaser on, much more a defender of the frontiers," remarked Texas Bill.

"Why, bless me," retorted Joe, "there's Tom Clark as I'm a sinner! Hast thou a strawberry on thy right arm?"

"Yes, I know thou art me long lost brother, Tom! Hast anything in the way of provinder?"

"How de, Joe! Tickled to see you, you bet! As to grub, we have 'bastante,' carne asado, chili Colorado, frijoles, and coffee as black as the beans before they were cooked.

"Bien dicha! My regard for you shall be expressed when I am not quite so famished. Come on, boys, and hung be he who first cries Hold! Enough! Sufficient quantity! or—oh my! Boys, just gaze at that grub! Don't any man speak to me for two hours, or I'll blow his eye-winkers off!"

The remainder of the party having followed Reckless Joe, now seated themselves before the camp-fire of Tom Clark's mess, to do that justice to a prairie supper that their long and tiresome ride had well fitted them for.

After disposing of an extraordinary quantity of roast meat, bear's meat stewed with pepper, and corn bread, washed down with black coffee, without milk, or sugar, pipes were brought into use, and the scouts, and captain, surrounded by a circle of Rangers, entered into a conversation in regard to the coming campaign.

"Who's last from Fort Brown, and what's Col. Ford doing?" inquired Captain Donaldson, after seating himself comfortably on a dead live-oak branch, and looking at his brave lads around him with pride.

Reckless Joe always made it a point to "sling in his gab" whenever there was a chance; he was as fond of talking as eating or fighting, and here yelled out across the camp:

"Oh yes, Kit! You, Kit Carson, Jr., namesake and nephew of the illustrious scout of the West! Come hither, me lord. How are the senoritas of Brownsville? What news from the fortress on the river? Give us your noble presence."

A powerful built boy, not over fourteen years of age, with rosy cheeks, and beardless, girlish face; his long, dark brown hair hanging below the shoulders, now stepped within the circle of fire-light, causing a murmur of admiration and love from all the Rangers, for he was the pet of the company, and although seemingly of feminine appearance, yet was able to ride or follow a trail with any of them.

The most expressive thing about him was his eyes, which were wild and piercing. Having been on the frontiers from birth, there was a constant watchfulness, a nervous rolling of the balls continually on all sides, and they seemed to bulge out, more than natural, from being too much in the presence of danger. This peculiarity of the eyes is noticeable in most men who have for any length of time been on the frontier.

As Kit stepped within the circle of fire-light, his eyes flew around the group, and then he addressed them:

"Well, boys, to tell you the truth, as I always do, I left Old Rip bucking at monte desperately, and cursing hard between deals, because he hadn't a hundred or so of you fellows to sweep up the river with."

"He is as mad as a fresh-rope mule, or a

broke monte-dealer, and swears if Sam Houston don't order some of the boys down his way, he'll go for the Chaparral Fox with a lone hand.

"Mat Nolan is down on San Fernandez, with sixty men, and Littleton is getting a crowd at San Patricio, having cleaned out all the boys of Live Oak who go with him every time.

"A scout ought to be sent down to Fort Brown, and let Old Rip know how things are fixed, right away.

"Cortina is camped above Reinosa ford, just off the trail, and has swept everything clean up the Government road."

"We must work then, boys," said Donaldson.

"Joe Booth, you can take half a dozen of the scouts, your picked crowd, and make for Fort Brown by way of King's Ranch, and Taylor's Wells. Here are the dispatches from Governor Houston to Col. Ford. Bill George, your pard will want to go with you, and I will send some one else for the ammunition to Patricio.

"Pick your crowd, and go at or before daylight, so as to put the leagues behind you before the heat of the day, for the stretch of sand between King's Ranch and the Colorado Lagoon is, I think, about as warm as any spot in Texas.

"If you meet any Greasers who look any way suspicious, I need not say don't let them get the best of you. Deliver the dispatches to 'Old Rip Ford,' and place yourselves under his orders; he may want you to scout up the river for information in regard to the movements of Cortina's gang of cutthroats. We will be in the chaparrals, ready for tough work, in ten days.

"We could get ready sooner, perhaps, but there is no use starting from here until the three companies are as near full as possible, and all ready to act together, as the Greasers might get wind of our movement.

"When we do get at them, boys, there'll be the hottest time, I reckon, there's been on the Rio Grande since Resaca de la Palma."

"All right, Cap," assented Reckless Joe. "I'll muster my clan. I want my pard (Texas Bill), Bill George, Tom Clark, Young Kit Carson, Jim Bearfield, and Bill Mann; that's my party. I'll take charge of the dispatches, but as I am not posted in the Rio Grande country, I wish our friend Kit, who is fresh from Fort Brown, to take charge of the scouts. What do you say, boys? We'll march under Kit in the service of the suffering citizens of the Rio Grande, skull and cross-bones, black flag, and all that sort o' thing counted in. We'll drive the yellow-skinned, greasy usurpers back to their holes, where they will be glad to grovel in the ashes of the Halls of the Montezumas.

As Joe Booth ended his little speech, he stepped across the circle and extended his hand to young Kit Carson, this being their first meeting, and the two were soon fast and firm friends.

Kit and Joe soon collected the Rangers that were to go with them in the morning, and everything was prepared in readiness for the early start, all of them arranging to sleep together beneath a live-oak on the outskirts of the camp, so not to disturb the other boys when they took their departure.

They then returned to Captain Donaldson's mess.

"Everything is all fixed, Cap," said Joe; "we won't see you again until we meet in the chaparrals. You can count on our being in Fort Brown as soon as horse-flesh can take us."

"All right, boys; Kit, you take good care of Joe. He's hunk among the Reds, but he's got to learn a heap about Greasers. I reckon we'll all turn in and get what sleep we can."

"Good-night and good-by, Cap," sung out the scouts who were to leave the next morning.

"Con el permiso de V. señores! Bueno noche!"* said Kit to his pard, as he rolled himself up in his blanket.

In less time than it takes to write it, not a human was to be seen in the Ranger camp; all were rolled in their blankets; the grove was wrapped in silence, the Rangers in repose, heedless of the sharp, quick barks of coyotes, the occasional shriek of a panther or the hooting of owls amid the oaks over their heads.

Here we will leave them, fit across the country over the large tracts of post and live-oaks, musquite thickets and prairies, in a northerly direction to new scenes and characters.

CHAPTER III.

MARTHA WELLS, THE TEXAN QUEEN.

Wreathed in its dark brown rings, her hair Half hid our heroine's forehead fair,—
Half hid and half reveal'd to view
Her full dark eye of hazel hue.
The rose, with faint and feeble streak,
So slightly ting'd the maiden's cheek
That you had said her hue was pale:
But, if she fac'd the summer gale,
Or spoke, or sung, or quicker moved,
Or heard the praise of those she loved,
Or when of interest was expressed
Aught that waked feeling in her breast,
The mantling blood in ready play
Rival'd the blush of rising day.

* With your permission, sirs, good-night.

San Antonio, the Alamo City! What thrilling incidents of history are connected with this, the principal city of Western Texas.

No street or plaza, path or trail, within its limits, but has been washed in the blood of heroes!

What tales of crime and massacre, of heroic fortitude, of unparalleled bravery and patriotism, could the lime-stone walls of the Old Alamo tell, were they gifted with speech.

On the eastern side of the San Antonio river, and the northeast corner of the Alamo Plaza, stands this, the most important building in Texas history.

Here it was that all the American population of the town took refuge when Santa Anna surrounded them with eight thousand soldiers.

Among the doomed whites were the celebrated Texan patriots, Col. David Crockett and Col. Bowie, the inventor of the famous knife which bears his name.

Over three hundred and sixty men women and children rushed madly into the old mission, hoping to preserve their lives. Alas, they knew not the nature of their foes; or, those who did, kept the knowledge to themselves.

From the time they entered the doors of the Alamo, those of the party who knew the treacherous character of the Mexicans, felt that they were doomed, and resolved to sell their lives dearly.

The Kentucky rifles poured death into the mass of Mexican soldiers, but their overwhelming numbers enabled them to fill their comrades' places as they fell. They soon burst in the doors of the main entrance, when the brutal massacre of men, women and children commenced.

The men fought, as desperate, brave men fight, until they were, one by one, shot down in their tracks, nobly defending the females behind them.

Col. Crockett fought with his knife, after being blinded by powder so he could no longer use his rifle, cutting down his enemies as they rushed upon him, and when, at last, he received his death-shot, thirteen Mexicans lay in one ghastly pile before him, killed by his one right arm!

Of all the doomed garrison, but one survived. A girl baby thrown from a window into the irrigating ditch, was rescued by a Mexican woman, who tenderly cared for the little thing, until the child was adopted by the State, and educated. She still goes by the name of "The Child of the Alamo," and I have listened to many sweet songs from her lips.

Passing north, from the north-east corner of the main Plaza, a rifle-shot or so, we come to a little, low unpretending Methodist Church, but the neat white cottage, with its flower garden, adjoining the church, is where we must enter.

In a room neatly and tastily furnished, far better than most Texan homes, are two females—one a matron of forty, the other a blooming girl of sixteen; the elder busy with needlework, the younger thrumming impatiently on a piano. As I am describing real characters and scenes, the betrothed wife of Joe E. Booth, (or Reckless Joe) must have more than passing mention.

Miss Martha Wells was of medium height, with long flowing dark brown hair, hazel eyes that pierced through and through those whom she deigned to address, with a faint blush continually upon her rounded cheeks, with all the gracefulness of a prairie fawn, and as quick of movement.

There was a dash of bravado about her which told of a true daughter of Texas, who would mount a wild mustang, and conquer him, too, if she started to do so.

For some time the look of concern and trouble that showed plainly in her features was battled against, and then, suddenly turning around on the piano-stool, the tears moistening her long eyelashes, she addressed her mother on the opposite side of the apartment:

"Mother, I cannot stand this suspense any longer. Poor brother Clay is now lying sick on the Rio Grande, only a few leagues above where Cortina's raids have extended. Joe Booth thought him secure from any molestation from this bandit chief, and has gone himself down country with Donaldson's Rangers to join the expedition against this king of guerrillas. Suppose some of the Mexican outlaws should advance up the river as far as the Guerrero ford, and poor Clay be murdered! Oh, to think of it, and we sitting here in idle security, doing nothing to help him! Could we ever forgive ourselves if such a horrible event should transpire? I cannot and will not bear this any longer!"

"My dear child, I am feeling as bad, certainly, about poor Clay, as you can. I did not close my eyes last night thinking of my son being in the situation he is. Why did we not keep him at home? His wild, uncontended mind led him into this trouble and danger. I do wish that John Moore had not have asked him to go, and hope they will both return to us in safety. Your enterprising brother-in-law must value his life cheap, or think a good deal of stock to go into such a country to purchase, and he, it seems to me, ought to have had better judgment than to have taken my boy along, not yet out of his teens."

"Mother, I said I could not bear this suspense

longer, and I will not. No use in talking how he came to be in such a dangerous locality, but talk of some way of getting him out of it. I am worried enough in regard to Joe; he is liable to lose his life any day with the Rangers, but there is no use trying to keep Joe out of the Rangers since he went to the Indian war with Capt. Burleson.

"Mother, I am going to the Rio Grande, after Clay, myself."

"Heavens, child! what are you talking about? Are you getting insane?"

"No, mother; far from it; but I have just come to my senses in regard to the matter. If a brother is sick, far away in a dangerous section of the country, among strangers, and it is possible for a sister to reach and aid him, it is her duty to do so."

"I think it possible for me to reach the Rio Grande in safety. You know I have had some prairie experience; am a fair horsewoman, and, if worst comes to worst, I can shoot a rifle or revolver well enough to make it dangerous to those who oppose me."

"My dear child, listen to reason. You know it is next to impossible for you to carry out such a wild plan, and who would go with you? You surely do not propose to go on a journey of one hundred and sixty miles, alone, two-thirds of it through a country where war-parties of Indians are liable to sweep down at any time?"

"Well, no; not exactly; I intend to enlist Jack Hodge and Clown; they are both in town—both friends of us all, and brave and true men. Clown is a little weak in his brain, poor fellow, since he had that awful fight with the Camanches, and is not as active as he would be if he had not had so many arrows shot into him. Only think of one man fighting fifteen Indians alone, killing eleven, and putting the rest to flight! I shall feel secure in the company of such men as they are known to be. I know they would stand by me to the death."

I shall wear the buckskin suit that John Moore brought from Monterey for Clay, and brother left a Sharpe's carbine and Colt's revolver behind, so I shall be well fixed for the road, I will have my hair cut so it will hang to my shoulders, and with a sombrero I shall look as masculine as some of the young boys in the Rangers. I know I shall not look more girlish than Sam Hall or Sim Cooley. Can I have your permission to go, mother?"

"Martha, I have as much regard for your welfare as my son Clay's, and hesitate upon giving you any encouragement in such a rash, although praiseworthy undertaking. I should worry myself to death in your absence."

"Mother, when I rode from fort Mason, thirty miles, in the night, down the Llano river, to the Ranger camp for assistance, the time the Camanches were butchering the rancheros within rifle-shot of the barracks, it was said that no other girl of my age in Mason county would have dared do it, and I am inclined to think I can make the trip to the Rio Grande in safety. You know how poor Clay must feel who has never been from home before. He must need the care of one who loves him. John would not have left him had he thought he was going to be seriously ill."

"You are a good, loving, brave and true daughter, Martha, and I have great confidence in your judgment. I am very much troubled in regard to Clay, and if you think Jack and Clown will go with you, I will say God speed, although I shall have no peace of mind until I see your dear face again."

Martha, who had during this conversation been gazing apparently from the window, but, instead, had observed every movement, and weighed every word of her mother, now rushed across the room, clasped her arms about her neck and kissed her affectionately, while the tears dropped from the eyes of both.

"Thank you, mother, for saying I can go, for I have thought and dreamed over this so much of late, since we heard by the scout, who brought the tidings of Cortina's last butchery, that Clay was on the Rio Grande sick, that I have felt that I must go, and feel that our good, brave Reckless Joe will find his way up the river, and that perhaps we shall all come back to San Antonio together. Oh, would not that be gloriously gay! Only think, mother, it is but three months since I rode after the Rangers to come and teach the Indians better than to murder the citizens of Mason! It was then I met Joe—our Joe. Why, mother, it seems as though we had known him always. This would not seem like the same world without him; he is so gay, always. I never saw him with the blues, and he never allows any one else to have them, when he is around. 'Shakespeare Joe,' some of the boys call him, and I do not wonder, as he is as fond of spouting as a whale."

"Joe is a good, brave boy, I know, but very, very reckless; and I am much afraid, will not live to a very ripe old age, should he stay in Texas. I wonder what he found to do to keep him in the excitement he likes so well, before he came here? Things must be rather tame in Massachusetts, compared with this State, I should judge?"

"I suppose so, and I hope Joe will not get

homesick, for we should be lost without him; but I must hasten and make preparations for this trip to poor Clay. I have the arms, and clothing necessary, and mounted on my own dear 'Whita Cloud,' which William Knox presented me, I am fixed for the trail, for there are but few horses like mine for speed, or endurance. But, by-by, mother; I must go up to the Plaza and find the boys, if I can. I know they are eager to join the Rangers against Cortina, and they can go down the river from the Guerrero ford."

And so saying, Martha skipped across the room for her hat, and almost flew down the street toward the Plaza, but somewhat moderated her pace as she approached that great mart of all Spanish built towns.

Passing the lime-stone block, looming up high above the insignificant "jacals," she turned to the right, up the north side of the Plaza, upon which the Plaza House fronted. But few white females were on the streets, at this time of the day, and she wended her way through the most mixed crowd of men that could be found on the American Continent—Americans, English, Germans, French, Spaniards, Mexicans, Negroes, and Half-Breeds, Rancheros, Muleteers, Merchants, Stockmen, Frontiersmen, and Teamsters, in all manner of costumes; but, high or low, rich or poor, all respectfully made way for the beautiful girl, and many a sombrero was tipped, and pleasant greeting given, by those who were so favored as to be acquainted with pretty Martha Wells. To insult a woman in San Antonio would bring speedy death to the rash individual who would do so.

Arriving at the Plaza House, Martha was fortunate in finding Jack Hodge, lazily leaning against the veranda post, near the main entrance, but at a nod of invitation from Martha, his laziness left him, and in an instant he was by her side walking toward the Military Plaza. As soon as the usual greetings were exchanged between the two, Jack addressed Martha apologetically:

"Miss Martha, I thought of calling at your mother's, this evening."

"Jack, I am glad to see you, and wish to have a talk with you, so we will, if you please, take a walk around the Military Plaza, which you know is always clear of a crowd except when they hang some poor fellow. As to your coming up this evening, Jack, I am afraid you would not have exerted yourself to that extent. They do say you are the laziest man in town except when you are on horseback, or a stage. Don't be offended at my plain way of speaking; but, how is it, Jack—do the boys misrepresent you?"

"No, I reckon not; I can't deny but what I am inclined that way. What is the use in rushing around, when you have nothing ahead to gain by it. When I get the lines in my hand, and six or eight rattling nags ahead, with say fifteen passengers on, and in the coach, I feel like myself more, and don't care much even for the road-agents, for I always carry two Colt's sixes, and most of them know it. But, you see, I'm off the road now and awful sick of town."

"That is what I thought, Jack, and I came to you as a friend to aid me, in what you may call a foolish thing."

Foolish, or not foolish, I am at your service, be it to break a wild mule, rope a mustang, scalp a Camanche, or cut Cortina's throat, although I acknowledge I want time for the last job."

"I'll not be so hard on you, perhaps, as either of the difficult feats you mention, although my project may lead you to the accomplishment of the latter. Let us turn toward the post-office; perhaps there is a letter from Joe. I do wish there was a mail between here and where poor Clay is, and this brings me to the subject on hand. Joe, you know, has gone down country with the Rangers, and cannot assist me. Brother Clay is sick on the Rio Grande, near the Guerrero ford, where John Moore left him when he went into Mexico to purchase stock. You do not know how worried mother and myself have been in regard to him, and mother has reluctantly consented for me to go to him, if I can get you and Clown to go with me. The Rangers will, when organized, sweep up the river, and if you go to the Rio Grande with me, you and Clown could scout down and join them, as I have heard you wished to do had you arrived here before they left the city."

"I want, oh so bad, to get to Clay and take care of him, until he is able to travel; and, you see, I have fixed the whole programme, and all that is wanted now is for you and Clown to say you will act as my escort."

"I have not seen Clown to-day, Miss Martha, but I know he is to be at Madam Candeleno's fandango to-night, and I will make it my business to find him. I have no doubt he will be glad to do you this favor, as I am myself. I am extremely sorry Clay is sick, away from home. He is too young for trouble; I would do this for him, even, if I had not the honor of the company of his fair sister."

"That will do for you, Jack; I don't allow people to flatter me, and it don't sound well from you, Jack. You are not used to it. I do hope you will see Clown, and that he will go;

but, wait here a moment until I inquire for the mail."

Miss Martha entered the post-office, and soon returned to Jack, holding a letter in her hand, and both turned up the Plaza, toward the residence of her mother.

Martha, when they came to a street unfrequented by pedestrians, excused herself, tore open the letter, and glanced hurriedly over its contents.

"Jack, this is from Reckless Joe; it was mailed at Oakville. Donaldson's company have organized, and Joe, with five other scouts, started the same day it was mailed, for Fort Brown, with dispatches to Colonel Ford from Governor Houston. The Rangers are to rendezvous below the Reinoza ford, where Colonel Ford is to take command, and attack Cortina "in force." Oh, I do hope Joe will take care of himself, but there is no use in relying upon his going any thing so contrary to his general habits."

"Miss Martha, I've noticed that those who take the most care of themselves, in this country, don't last long; they drop off suddenly, while those who take things as they comes—go in rough, not thinking or caring for their own personal welfare—generally come out all right. Now, when a fellow is found to be a coward, for instance, he had better be anywhere than in Texas, for everybody will snub him, and insult him, until he must eventually get into a row, in which he will have to pass in his checks—beg pardon for the gambling slang. Now, Joe is just the galoot-man, I should have said—for frontier life; he is brave, adventurous, in fact, Reckless Joe is a very appropriate alias for him. But, by the way, I have not seen Joe since he had his eyes so badly injured. I heard of it in Austin, but not the circumstances. How did it happen?"

"Oh, haven't you heard of that? Why, everybody in Western Texas was talking of it at the time. Well, Joe, Jourden Bennett, and some other Rangers, had captured two Indians, in a fight, and were going to keep them as hostages, thinking to exchange them for two women that had been captured by Big Foot, the Comanche chief.

"The Indians were bound, in camp, and worked loose from their bonds, in the night, crawled up to where Joe was, at the fire, scooped up hot ashes and embers, and threw them directly into his face before he could get his pistol from the scabbard. They then sprung out upon the prairie to escape, but were both killed by the other boys, who awoke in time to prevent them from getting away. One of them, it was said, was killed before he ran ten paces. Joe suffered greatly for some time, but has nearly recovered.

"But, here we are at mother's. Jack, come in and have a chat with her. I hate to go away and leave her here, and hope Sister Mary will try and keep her from missing me. Come, she will be glad to see you."

"I am greatly obliged for the invitation, but I must return to the Plaza House, and then over to Sappington's stable, to see after my horse, who is some lame; it is necessary that we all have good stock under us, on the trip you propose."

"Jack, I believe you had rather loaf around the Plaza than sit and chat with us. You do not seem partial to ladies' society, and seldom accept our invitations, but you will get enough of me before we reach the Rio Grande."

"You are greatly mistaken; I am very fond of ladies' society, but I have to keep my tongue bridled so, while with them, having mixed in rough crowds so much, since I left the States; that is quite a tiresome task for me, to keep from letting words slip that would not sound well to refined ears. The slang of the stables and roads, prairies and camp, comes so natural; and I will not promise to do as well as I have during this walk, on our way to the Rio Grande."

"All right, Jack; I shall put no restrictions on your language, as long as you talk like a gentleman, as I know you to be. I am used to prairie slang, having spent most of my life in Texas, not remembering much of my birthplace, Virginia. But, by-by, Jack; if you will not come in, be sure you see Clown to-night, and come and see us here in the morning."

With a farewell smile, Martha tripped into the cottage. Jack, respectfully lifting his sombrero, and heaving an immense sigh of relief, retraced his steps toward the Plaza, soliloquizing by the way, giving vent to the pent-up words he had been forcing back, as they were at his tongue's end, during the walk with Martha.

"Dog-gone my pecul'ar pictur'! I'll just be smashed, tipped, curflumixed, and foundered, if I don't feel like a b'il'd mule. She's the dangdest, purtiest, smartest, slickest piece of calico I ever seen, inside or out a coach, and she w'ares her harness b'utiful, and tosses her head like a three-year old mustang, upon ther perrarie, what's never bin roped. Joe is a lucky cuss, to git on the right side of her, and not git his gizzard broke, and I hanker arter a kiss from her sweet lips, as bad as an old stage hoss dus for oats, after a-doublein' stations, or a perrarie man dus fur water, in the middle of ther Staked Plains, but I'm squar' alw'is, and never 'll go

back on a friend like Joe; not much! She's jest as safe with Jack as an express package, and I never broke one yet, nor 'lowed a road-agent to do it either. I reckon that gal's passage is paid to kingdom come, strait through to Heaven, on the back seat, and I'd like tur drive her through, when her time comes ter go. Strange ther ain't no time-table fur us humans to know when we've got to turn over our fares, unharness, and git fur unknown, unexplored reg'ons; but I don't reckon they'd want such a cuss up there, as I am!

"I'm O. K. all the time, except when I'm full of whisky, then look out for Jack, everybody! he don't care whar' he drives, and has no favorite hoss. I'd be holdin' the lines behind a spank-up team now, if I could just pass the drinks and order up a safer hand; and there's no use talking, I've got to knock off this whisky biz or bus t. I'm as dry now, and my lips as cracked, as an old harness. Here goes fur Bob Caile's, fur about four fingers, strait, that 'll take the trembles out'en me. I couldn't a talked like a gentleman, States style, with Miss Martha much longer; it don't cum natural to me now, and tires me awful. I'll go to the fandango to-night, and see Clown; he'll glide easy onto this trail, to please Martha. Why, everybody likes her, and who cu'd help it!"

"I'll git a good squar' drink at Bob's, then taper off to-night, sure, or I'll see snakes, an' Inguns, 'fore we git to the Medina river."

Jack entered the bar, on the corner of the Plaza, kept by Bob Caile, and as he stepped in, he little thought he was about to witness a horrible example against his future potations.

Leaning against the bar, with a glass half-full of liquor in his hand, was an old Texan, who had passed years in the service of his adopted State, a brave and honorable man, respected by all, for his valor, and services. He had been captain of Rangers, in many a hard-fought field. His eyes were wild, and bloodshot; the glass trembled in his hand, and he anxiously, and with a startled air, looked at Jack as he came in, as if expecting an enemy, but the startled look gave way to one of pleasure, and he nodded, and slapped his hand on the bar, in invitation; *he was too full for utterance just then.*

Jack needed no second invitation, and the glasses clinked together. Hardly had they been returned to the bar empty, and as Jack was about to address the old Texan, when another party of men entered boisterously from the Plaza.

One of these men was a bitter political enemy of the old Texan's, just arrived from Austin, and had evidently been expected by the old Texan, who turned around, and as his eyes fell upon the man he detested, his hand went in a trembling, quivering manner, around his belt to his Colt's revolver, as he hissed the words:

"Liar! Poltroon! Coward!"

Instantly his opponent grasped his pistol, and backed from the barroom into the Plaza; the crowd receded with blanched faces, as these men each stepped, one backward, the other forward, from the veranda, their eyes glaring hate. When free from the crowd, at ten paces apart, the pistols were leveled, each at the other.

"Hold, for God's sake, Cap!" said Jack; "you're too drunk to fight."

His words were not heeded; the old Ranger trembled, but not with fear, as he pressed the trigger; there were two reports, an instant's interval between, and still both men stood glaring at each other unharmed.

The sharp click of the hammers—which sent a thrill of horror through the bystanders, those who were unused to such scenes—then, quick as a flash of lightning—for human life now depended upon sleight of hand—the pistols were again elevated, and a wavering motion of the arm was noticed in the old Ranger, a difficulty in catching the sights. It cost him his life, for his opponent's pistol belched forth its leaden messenger of death, which found a home in the brain of the old Texan, who fell with a dull thud to the earth, without a struggle, and there he lay, a limp and motionless heap of clay.

The murderer walked away, still holding his revolver, and with keen eyes watching to see if any of the old Texan's friends wished to take it up.

"'Twas a fair fight; no advantage," says one. Most of the crowd agreed to this verdict; it was fair in Texas.

Yes, they called it *fair*, for a man in his sober senses to stand up and fight for his life against a man who was drunk, with weapons that required a steady eye and arm.

Within one mile of the Plaza, in a neat cottage, was a gentle wife and young children, who little knew their dearest friend on earth was laying on the public square, his white face cold in death, his tongue hushed forever.

And who that saw the corpse borne home to them, and witnessed the heartrending agony of this bereaved family, could ever again honestly advocate the sale of rum?

Oh, you who legislate in favor of a license for the sale of, and you who vend this vile poison, which brings more misery, suffering, crime, and woe into this favored land than all other evils combined, think you that you will be held guilt-

less of its work in the great day when all profit from its sale will be as naught to you?

CHAPTER IV.

HOW JACK HODGE ENJOYED A FANDANGO.

MEN shudder with horror when some dreadful crime is perpetrated, or an accident happens which hurls human beings into eternity, but are very backward in profiting by a knowledge of the cause of these events.

So it was with Jack Hodge, after assisting to bear the remains of the old Texan to his heart-broken wife and children; and seeing that no words of his would mitigate their grief, he started for the Plaza again.

The death of his old friend affected Jack and made him quite blue, and as this was an unusual feeling with him, he being generally of a joyous disposition and fond of fun, under the circumstances he came to the conclusion to drown his sorrow in the flowing bowl, and turned off from his course to the Main, into the Alamo Plaza.

Here he found a congenial friend in the person of Phil. H. Immeke, and the two talked of the circumstances connected with the shooting affray, over their lager, in the cool front room of Immeke's restaurant.

Some time was spent here before Jack wended his way again, toward the main Plaza, muttering to himself as he walked along:

"Wall, I must have sumthin' stronger than Immeke's lager to set me O. K. This shootin' scrape has knocked ther buckles all of'en me, an' I feel loose enough to sling myself at the fandango."

When he arrived at the Plaza again he entered Bob Caile's barroom, where he found quite a crowd congregated, discoursing on the incidents connected with the shooting of the old captain, and Jack was called upon as an eyewitness for the particulars, as the barkeeper was very busy; drinks were called for to keep up the interest in the story and keep Jack's tongue limber.

Most of the people were indignant at the murder—it could be called by no other name—and exasperated at the assassin for taking the Cap. when drinking, and decided that it was not exactly the square thing, for he would have had a poor show had he met the captain when he was sober, as he was considered the best shot in San Antonio except Charley Pyron.

Jack swore he'd show the chap afore mornin' what shootin' was, if he met him, drawing his Colt's revolver, half-cocking the same and running the cylinder around, to see if the chambers were full loaded.

"Jack, you'd better let that fellow alone," said the barkeeper; "he's a dead shot."

"He'll be a *dead* shot if I draw bead on him," said Jack, and he replaced his six-shooter in its scabbard, and sauntered out into the night air with a wavering, slouchy gait.

He stood a moment on the veranda of the Plaza House, when he suddenly remembered his meeting with Martha Wells on the same spot, and also that he had promised to see the Clown in regard to the proposed trip to the Rio Grande.

He had just drank enough to make him happy, and at the same time it was but a step to almost maddening fury. It needed but few words to make him a hard man to deal with. In this state he started for the fandango.

Crossing the Plaza to the post-office and turning to the right, then the left, he went on until he came to the cock-pit.

He was now in the Mexican quarter of the city, and his surroundings made his thoughts dwell upon these people, associating them eventually with Cortina, the Rio Grande outlaw, and when he entered the clearing in the musquitos, where the fandango-house stood, he had come to the conclusion that no Greaser should interfere with his dancing or put on any extra airs over him.

It had been rumored about town that spies of the robber chief were in San Antonio, and Jack thought the fandango would draw them, if such was the case, and he would keep his eyes peeled and watch for them.

So, pulling his soft sombrero down over his face, he entered the fandango-house, and seated himself among the "wall-flowers," by the door, without attracting attention from any one except those near him, who, in the dim candlelight, did not recognize him.

Some twenty couple were on the floor, whirling in the mazes of a Spanish waltz, to the music of guitars and violins.

There were but few Americans present, and Clown was not to be seen.

Jack noticed there were some Mexicans he had never seen in San Antonio before, a villainous looking set of half a dozen, who seemed to keep together at one end of the fandango-house, where coffee, frijoles (black beans) and tortillas (corn cakes) were sold, and he resolved to keep close watch on them.

When the waltz was ended the Americans left the house, and Jack found himself the only "Gringo" in the place.

He arose from his seat, and engaged a pretty Mexican girl he had met before, led her near the end where the suspicious Mexicans stood, and called for a cotillion.

The stranger Greasers instantly took women and called for a *waltz*.

Now, Jack knew the previous dance had been a *waltz*, and the Mexicans stood one side when they could have danced, had they wished.

This was evidently done to show that they intended to rule the fandango, and to indicate their hatred for the Gringo, who had no one to back him.

Jack's blood was up; he became as sober as a judge in an instant, and brought his six-shooter around, handy for use.

"We'll have a cotillion, right here, or bu'st up this shebang," said Jack; then turning to one of the Greasers, who seemed to hold authority over the others, he said: "What in thunder have you got ter say about this dance? In the name of the devil, your lord and master, who are you, anyhow?"

The Mexican faced Jack, and sung in a sneering, taunting manner:

"Soy puro Mexicano, Nada tengo del Gringo, (I am a pure Mexican, with nothing of Gringo in me), then hissed between his teeth, as he ended, *Tontol* (fool).

"Then I'm a fool if I don't put a Gringo ball into you, right here."

Quick as a flash, a long stiletto glittered in the hand of the Mexican, and he sprung at Jack, but, before he had made two steps a bullet from Jack's revolver found his brain. The other five instantly drew their murderous knives, and like tigers leaped over the dead body of their comrade toward Jack.

Three more, shot through the heart, fell in a heap at Jack's feet, who, not having time to work his weapon any further, was borne to the floor by the two survivors. Their knives were raised above his heart; they glittered an instant in the air, and as they started down on their errand of death, the loud report of a Sharpe's carbine rung through the fandango-house from the open door; the arm of one fell helpless on Jack's breast, the glancing ball that had broken it struck the other on the head, rendering him senseless, and he fell across Jack's limbs.

The next instant the wild yell of Clown rung through the fandango-house, and on he came with uplifted bowie, which he buried in the heart of the broken-armed Mexican, while Jack's knife let out the life-blood from the other.

Panting and perspiring with exertion and excitement, Jack worked his way into a sitting posture, among the dead, and coolly wiped his knife on the jacket of the nearest; then, looking up at Clown, who was gazing with admiration at him and his work, he said:

"Clown, yer in on time THIS TRIP. I had my checks ready to pass in, but hated dog-gone to do it to a Greaser. You saved me the disgrace, and I owe you a life."

"Yer on the wrong trail there, Jack. I owe you, for giving me the chance to knock another cut-throat over, but you've been playing *Davy Crockett* by the looks of things. How did you get away with all these fellers?"

"You jest bet when I start in on the shoot somethin's got to drop. My six shoots plumb where I hold her, and my fingers are nimble; I had a whole team on me this trip, but they'll never wear harness ag'in, nor *waltz*, either, I reckon. I swore I'd dance a *cotillion*, and I'm agoin' to have it. All the gals of San Antonio, Mexicans and Gringos, left sudden when the row commenced, and I reckon the music-fellers thought I'd furnish music the rest of the night. That big cuss there wanted to *sing* to me, but I wanted to dance a *cotillion*, and I'm bound to do it. Take that lariat hanging there, Clown, and rope a few galls, an' bring 'em in."

"By the jumpin' Jerusilum, Jack, I believe you're gettin' cracked. Did one of the cut-throats git a lick at yer head? There ain't a human, I'll bet my Sharpe's, this side the cockpit by this time."

"Well, Clown, never mind; most too tuckered ter dance, anyhow; let's see if the cusses have anything of value about their garments. Here's a bunch of papers; I'll keep an' examine 'em some other time; and here's a few doobloons on this chap; and that galoot there, I reckon, carried the small change. Told yer so; there's enough for a good square drunk, and a straiten up drink, all round. We'll confiscate the knives, and, look here, Clown, we better swop sombreros with these yaller republicans, fur our'n are gettin' rather worn and seedy sleepin' in the stable, an' usin' 'em fur night-caps. I'm fixed, and fitted with a new one. Just jar them cranium prospecters outen it, will yer; I don't care ter change breeds."

"You bet, I'll just swop with this fancy-rigged son of the Montezumas; he has a sombrero with the brim trimmed with gold lace, and a gold-headed snake, with red eyes, for a band; it'll just set me up nobby, and his red silk sash is what I've been layin' for. We've made quite a haul, Jack. Look-a-here, my fingers are so dangly twisted up since them cussed Injins shot my muscles away, with their pesky arrers up country, that I can't git into this feller's pocket, and there's sumthin' hard in it that may be wal'uble."

"Roll the cuss over this way, pard; I'm too played out ter git up. I swan-to-christy it's a deranger pistol! Well, he's the broken-armed

chap, so he's *your* meat, and the pistol's *your*'n by prairie law, or stage law either, fur that matter. Clown, I wish I weren't so fleshy; takes a good deal ter keep me on the road. See if Madam Candlestick left any of her coffee and grub when she vamous this respectable ranch. I'm as hungry as a buffer what's been bogged a week ten foot from the bank on Paint Creek."

"Here's slathers of coffee and fixens, Jack. Git up and sit on the table, or here's sum chairs, regular old raw-hide-rippers. Yer ain't hurt, are ye?"

"No, not bad; but, yer see, Clown, I had such hot work fur a spell ther, and a good load of Plaza House gin aboard, that I'm kinder foun-dered like, and don't care ter stir much, but if lunch is ready, I'm in, every time."

And Jack extricated himself from the dead Mexicans, and joined Clown at the table, where they both devoured a goodly quantity of the provender left behind by the old woman, who was sole proprietor of the fandango-house.

The strong coffee cleared up the somewhat clouded brain of Jack Hodge, and he seemed to feel more comfortable and satisfied with himself, especially as he cocked his eye toward the silent forms of his would-be murderers.

"Now, Clown, old boy, just skirmish around among them Rio Grande chaps fur cigarettes, and then we'll be all hunk."

"Jack, it seems to me you want a ternal sight o' waitin' on ter-night. Dog-goned if I ain't gettin' tired of it."

"I'm tired, Clown. How the deuce did yer happen ter come in, just in time ter get a hand in this deal? Why I spected ter see yer here when I fust arroved."

"Why, pard, I was intendin' ter come, when I told yer this mornin', but I met Bob Caile, Shipley, and Bill Rodgers agoin' to the lake, and went with 'em to see if I couldn't knock a deer over. They are all camped out there to-night, and I cum in, just because I told you I was agoin' to be here; I just came through the musquits, had my Sharpe's with me, ha'n't been home yet, and a devilish good thing for you, I reckon, that I popped in here, as I did."

"Well, Clown, we'll make it all right sometime. You may be in as tight a fix yourself, and I hope I'll be drivin' past about that time. Tell you what, these cigarittas was made in Metamoras, go you a slug on it, and here among these papers, I find a plan of the American side of the Rio Grande, with all the trails, and the openings, in the chaparrals, marked down. We've got the right birds this trip. They don't *waltz* around much, do they, pard! Tell-you-what, let's set 'em up to the table, kinder natural like, and the old madam will get scared out of a few brief moments of her too extended existence. She's nine hundred and ninety-nine now, and looks more like a resustreated mummy than anything I knows on."

"Well, Jack, I'll help 'set 'em up,' but don't talk about scaring the old woman; she's give me many a plate of frijoles, when I was hungry, and she's took care of many of the boys when sick. I know she won't scare worth a cent, or I wouldn't do it."

And they lifted the inanimate bodies of the Mexicans, seated them around the table, leaning their heads upon their arms, which rested upon the same. The candles were left burning, and the two walked to the door, and then stood and gazed back at their now harmless foes.

"They'll never cut any more throats, or sling any cussed talk at us, Clown, and they'll never *sing*, or *WALTZ* ag'in, without they *waltz* around, among the hot coals down below. I spect that's the place they went to, pard, and I'm agoin' to be good, for I couldn't stand the climate or company where they are. Come on, Clown! Adios, senors! Buenos noche! (Farewell, sirs; good-night.) And they tipped their sombreros, in mock salutations, as they stepped out into the darkness of the night, leaving the ghastly forms of the dead men seated at the table, little streams of blood trickling down the chair-legs, forming a dark crimson pool beneath the table. Death and silence reigned in the usual haunt of music and revelry.

Jack and Clown meandered through the musquit thickets, back to the town, and during the walk, Jack told his companion in regard to the proposed trip to the Rio Grande. Clown eagerly consented to accompany the party, and they both stood in the center of the Plaza, and with raised right hands, gazed up into the moonlit heavens, and swore they wouldn't take a drink after the present night, until they struck the Rio Grande.

"But, we'll go in and swaller some p'ison now, Clown, to bind this 'ere thing," said Jack, and they entered the Plaza Bar.

Jack walked up, and slapped down a doulloon.

"Say, old hoss, give us a hogshead of whisky, and a thousand segars, and you fellers sittin' on them barrels round ther, an' wishin' you had what's in 'em, all on you kinder herd up this way, and help put away the stuff I've ordered. I've struck Mexican gold, and silver; it laid in pockets, and on the surface, but I reckon we got all there was about the diggin's."

"See here, Nace! how in thunder is it you ain't at the Bull's Head? Reckon you must be

lost. I'll give you four bits if you'll go and find Hank, the coroner; I've got biz for him."

Crazy Nace soon returned with Hank, having found him at George Horner's barroom, and he made his appearance rather red in the face, and over-earnest in his manner.

"Haloo, Hank!" said Jack, "take sumthin' to steady yer narves, for there's a job fur you up at the fandango. A holesale job in your line, that'll make that nose of yours a shade less brilliant than 'tis now."

"You've got to sit on six dead Greasers, and they are all sittin' there awaitin' fur yer."

"How's that, Jack? Have you been getting into a row, too? There has been as good a man shot to-day as ever stood in San Antonio, not excepting Crockett, or Houston, and that's the old captain. It would take a good many Greasers to make up for his loss. When I say Greasers, I do not mean our Texas Mexicans: they are as good citizens as we have, honest, reliable, and ready to fight, in the service of the State, any time they are called upon. Where are there any more honest, brave, and noble men than our Jose Penalosa, the Castros, Berreros, Caravajals, and scores of others. But what do you mean about sitting on Greasers? Strange we haven't heard about any row at the fandango."

"Well, Hank! I'll tell yer, after I take another drink. This is my last night on the whisk'. I've got biz on hand that won't allow it; I'm plumb sober for the next two weeks, and you'll see a straight trail after me only when I meander. Fill up, Clown; you don't seem to be very rambunkshiously dry. You are generally pretty eager for fluids. All full? Here's success to Old Rip Ford, and a slow but sure death to Cortina!"

"Bravo, bravissimo! Good for Jack! But, explain things to Hank, and the boys," said Clown.

Jack turned around, his back to the bar, and raising himself up by his hands, seated his fleshy form upon it, laid his sombrero down, after gazing, admiringly, on his new head-gear, wiped away the perspiration, and, with a good deal of flourishing of hands, told his story of the night's adventures.

"Well, boys, the way on it was, I had biz with Clown here, and thought I'd find him around, buzzin' some of the señoritas up the chaparral—I don't suppose the young gals would notice him much, since he was cut and slashed so by the Reds. Well, I toddled up that section *rather full*, by the way. You know our suspicions have been, by the way news has traveled, that Cortina has had spies in this burgh, and as soon as I struck the fandang', and was comfortably squatted, I spotted some Rio Granders there that looked and acted kinder strange; from their appearance, I should judge they would, either one of 'em, stick a man in the dark, but 'twould be in the back, for about four bits, providin' the Mexican buzzard, with the snake in his mouth, weren't worn much, and there was a dead sure thing it weren't puter. I didn't see nothin' of Clown, and the chaps as was there I knew I couldn't count on, and I was too—*ti-red* to walk back for any of you fellers. I'd liked ter have had Jim Ransom, or Jim Brennan, there, about then; but, howsoever, things worked as you'll hear. I eventually decided to wade in, on a lone hand, pervised my perspicaciousness hadn't gone back on me. Yer needn't grunt, Van Wells, fur you'll find that in every well regerlated dictionary, and I reckon I can spit out a word once in a while that'll go ahead of you, for you git me, with yer billiard talk, 'specially when I'm a little biling over with liquids, and my tongue ain't checked up straight."

"Oh! go ahead, Jack! You're meanderin', as you call it," said Hank.

"Wher' was I?" said Jack, scratching his head.

"Why, just where you discovered the Greasers."

"Oh, yes! I reckon I was. Well! These fellers weren't dancin', mind you, but jest standin' there smokin' the'r shucks, and gazin' at the gals, what were jest a-flyin' around in a *waltz*, and when that war over, I lit in on a piece of brilliant calico, and called for a *cotill'on*.

"Then them Greasers went for women on ther jump, and called for a *waltz*. I seen a muss war brewin', and tightened up my harness, but let the check loose on my tongue, *you bet*.

"The gals and San Antonio boys commenced to git up and git.

"I asked the boss-Greaser what he me'nt and who he was, *very perlite*; then he commenced to sing to me, called me a fool, and bragged on his Mexican blood.

"My blood took a Niag'ra-leap, and so did my six, as he let at me with his centrepede-sticker. I sent him to kingdom-come, and three more what follered him, but the other two got me down afore I could use my shooter ag'in, and had their steel over me, when my pard, here, let fly with his Sharpe's-rifle from the door, and bamboozled them, so we fixed them with our knifes, and they're all a-waiten' for you up there, Hank."

"Here's the papers I found on 'em, to show they belong to a bogus line, but the loose change

I'll sling for whisk', as long as't lasts and any body's dry."

"Well, Jack," said Hank. "these papers are evidence enough, as to their character; here's a furlough for six men, signed—Cortina el Ranchero—but we know he did not sign it, as he can't write his name; doubtless it was by his authority; and I'll have a cart go up in the morning, and bury the yellow-skinned spies. They will have six less to fight on the Rio Grande, and you boys ought to have a letter of thanks signed by Mayor Baquor, and the aldermen. Jack, you are some on the *shoot*, I reckon?"

"Some, Hank, but, better on the drink. Give us a prussic-acid-cocktail, and don't shake it. I see all the Mexicans have taken to fancy-drinks, and they're all shook up in the same tin. Here's fun. Now, good-night, boys! Come on, Clown, we'll bunk inside a stage, by the stable; that's *my home*," and with parting good-nights from the barroom loungers—who dreaded the time when the bar closed, and were always waiting for it to open in the morning; poor, miserable slaves, that are found everywhere that rum is sold, and where is it not?—Jack and Clown meandered around the northwest corner of the main Plaza to Sappington's stable, to sleep away the two or three hours before dawn.

Jack's last words, as he nestled up on the back-seat of a coach, and pulled his sombrero down around his ears, were:

"I say, Clown, which yer rather dance, cotill'on or *waltz*?"

"Why, a cotill'on, of course. You bet! Now, give us a rest!"

CHAPTER V.

CAPTURING A WILD IRISHMAN.

A face more fair you well might find,
For 'twas plain he knew the sun and wind;
Nor boasted, from their tinge when free
The charm of regularity;
But ev'ry feature had the power
To aid th' expression of the hour;
Whether gay wit, and humor sly,
Danc'd laughing in his light blue eye;
Or bended brow, and glance of fire,
And kindling cheek, spoke Erin's ire.

LET a man crawl out from under the blankets which compose his prairie bed, upon mother earth, souse his head into the creek, comb his hair—that is, if he awakens with his scalp still in its usual place, and is so fortunate as to be the possessor of a comb—put a few pounds of beef broiled on the coals of his camp-fire and a good-sized chunk of corn-pone into his stomach, washed down by a quart of strong black-coffee—let him then mount his well-tried mustang and start on a gentle lope through the brilliant, fragrant flowers of a Texas prairie, and if he isn't a happy creature, then he must be a consummate fool, and not fit to live on God's green earth.

Nine-tenths of the people in this world do not know how to live; they just linger here, seem out of place, always grumbling, no matter what turns up. Even if it is in their favor, they are too contrary to own it.

The other tenth, one-half of them live in Texas—high estimate, I admit—and you couldn't drive them out, or if you did, they would find their way back again. Once in Texas, always in Texas, is a common saying there.

The other half of the tenth, are scattered promiscuously, around the world, and just as they have found out the secret of enjoying life, they kick up, and go under.

There were not six more healthy, hearty, or happy men in the world than our scouts who glided out of the camp on Banketta Creek, at three o'clock the next morning, after Wild Will "sashayed" though the camp.

Reckless Joe, with the dispatches from Governor Houston, rode by the side of Kit Carson, the boy scout; the others following, their mustangs throwing out in front the drops of pearly dew from the long rich grass and flowers—strong contrast to the weary leagues of hot sand they must cross before they reached fort Brown.

Armed to the teeth, with Colt's revolvers and Sharpe's rifles, all familiar with savage-war, they were able to stand their own against five-times their number of Reds, or Greasers.

Thus equipped and in spirits ready for enjoyment adventure and duty, they rode away over the flower-bespangled prairie, discussing as they rode all manner of questions, and relating many an odd experience—a capital way to while away the time. In the midst of one of Tom Clark's *yarns* came the order from Reckless Joe:

"Halt, boys! Gaze at that bed of flowers; they extend for miles—just opening to say 'good-morning' to their father, the Sun. Isn't that a goodly sight?"

"Beautiful"—"gay!" "mighty fine!" "high-falutin!"—came from the boys.

"Puts me in mind of my pard's—Little Yank's—poetry:

"The man who sees no beauty in the simple prairie flower,
Or the golden tints, in the Western sky, at sunset's soothing hour,
He'll have no help for poverty's child, no sympathy for grief,
And I'd trust him the length of a lariat, and watch him as a thief."

"Every word true, every time. Even old Big Foot Wallace loves birds and flowers. He keeps a tame panther for a ranch-cat, to stand guard for him when he is away. He left camp at Banketta this morning before we did, to go home and change his old Kentuck for a Sharpe's rifle, which he always takes when there's hot work ahead; he will be on hand at the rendezvous in the chaparrals. I don't think I shall go to visit him only when I'm sure he is at home, for the panther might not be very friendly to a stranger."

"Is that so, Kit? Then he's got a panther. Darn good thing if he'd take him on the trail, the cuss could claw off scalps and such, an' save a heap o' trouble, but the tarnal critter might not care whether the scalps were on a White or Red."

"Halt, boys!" commanded Kit; "there's something away toward Casa Blanco, on the prairie, that looks human, bobbing up and down; rather a peculiar gait for a man, though. Yes, it is a man—perhaps a Greaser spy! Devide and surround, boys!"

In an instant the scouts, in a dashing gallop, were speeding over the plain, three to the south, the others to the north, and soon surrounded what proved to be a wild-eyed, ragged, forlorn-looking Irishman, mounted upon a diminutive jackass, the rider being compelled to draw up his feet and rest them behind on the animal's back—his knees then nearly reaching the ground.

A burst of uncontrollable laughter greeted the poor fellow from all sides, as the Rangers rode up to him.

"May the devil fly away wid yees; but, what's the use callin' on his majesty! He's too much ef a gentlemin to be found in *this* curse ef a countrry. Are yees humans or saviges that yees go blathering that a-ways? 'Pon me soul, ef I 'ad me shelaley wid me, I'd smash the 'ole o' yees into smithereens!"

"Bad luck to the ship that brought me to a land loike this! Be the powers o' pewter there's never a tree or bush growin', an' you'd not see wather enough in a day's travel to give a decent drink to a flea.

"T'undher and ownes; did yees niver see an Irishman afore? Be jabers, but I suppose it's civil I must spake to yees, being in the sitiuation I am at prisent.

"Troth, gentlemin, yees haven't a drap o' whisky or wather wid yees? Sure I'm famished intirely, an' was just hunthin' a hole, but devil a hole cu'd I find at all, at all, to crawl into, say me prayers, and die widout Praste to console me, knowing the wolves w'u'd give me a decent wake,oney how."

While talking the Irishman had slid off the jackass, upon the grass, with weakness.

The animal's ears loped down; its eyes were half-closed; its neck covered with wood-ticks, and hair rumped in every direction.

Taking the two together they were as played-out a pair as ever was seen.

The Irishman was in rags; a stiff beard of several days' growth, uncombed hair, which bristled in all directions, as bad as the animal's he had ridden, and begrimed with dust and sand—all were evidences of his disconsolate condition.

The Rangers sprung from their horses and canteens were held to the sufferer's mouth; saddle-bags were inspected and dried beef and corn bread were laid before him, which he devoured like a ravenous wolf. It was plain to see that the man had suffered greatly from hunger and thirst.

The Rangers refrained from asking any questions until he had satisfied himself in the way of eating and drinking.

With a sigh of relief and satisfaction the Irishman turned his gaze upon his captors—enemies or friends he knew not which—although their kindness he thought could come only from a friendliness, and the look he gave them, as his eyes took a rove around the circle, after disposing of rations enough for a whole corporal's guard, told him of deep sympathy with his sufferings.

"May the Holy Vargin bless yees all, boys, and may yees never know hunger an' thirst yersels. It's a new mon I am, an' a wonder it is to me where ye got the grub I've been 'atin'. Sure it's a long ways ye must 'a' brought that same, for devil a thing that I've seen that a decent mon 'ud put in his stomach this monay a day. By St. Patrick I can't say how long, me head's been so strange with the hate, thirst, an' hunger."

"Where did you come from, my friend, and where are you going?" asked Kit.

"Sure I'm from Kill-a-me-thomas, County Waterford, in the ould sod, and I'm goin' to the devil, judgin' from the road I've traveled."

"Yes, but where did you come from last, on the coast, at Galveston, or Matagorda bay?"

"Be jabers, 'twas nayther. I landed from Boston, at Corpus Christi, an' 'twas there I purchased a horse, and be advice I cum this way to start a ranch, as yees call it. Troth an' they told me there was horses in plenty for the catchin', an' I c'n'd live on nothin' in Texas, but, bad luck to mel I lost me horse the fust night. I think 'twas sumthin' he ate that didn't agree

wid the crather, for he was after laping and jumpin' around, so I was forced to git off him an' camp before I intended; he seemed to take a great dislike to me, and in the mornin' when I went where he was he was no longer there. As to livin' on nothin', 'pon me soul it's many a long day afore I'm after tryin' it ag'in. God be wid ye, ould Kill-a-me-thomas. 'Tis there a fellow could take it aisy, smokin' his dhudheen, an' bad luck it was me farther's son ever left the ould sod.

"Sure, afther I lost me horse, 'twas great troubles befall me. It's snakes they must live on here, for 'pon me soul it's nothin' else I've seen, devil take them, for they give many a scare, an' but for the pickin' up of that anamile there, I'd 'a' gone dead entirely. 'Twas glad I was to crawl on his back an' little trouble, too, he being so small of his age, I'm thinkin', an' by his manes I kept clear of the varmints. Sure he don't mind them at all, at all. A thousand of 'em might rattle their tails at him, an' hed only wink at 'em. Jack has been a consolin' friend to me in me troubles, although it was hard to see him fillin' his belly wid grass an' his masther a-starvin'."

"What is your name, my good fellow, and why did you not strike to the north toward San Patricio? You have been in the desert—the worst part of this portion of the State."

"Me name was Mike Keefe, at 'ome, bedad, but, worroo, worroo, I'm thinkin' I don't deserve it any more, for comin' to such a God-for-saken country, beggin' yer pardon, gentlemin, if it's yer place of residence. Sure I've traveled north, south, east, and west, and the whole I've passed until this last hour wouldn't kape a daacent pig."

"Well, boys, what on earth are we a-going to do with Mike? He cannot keep up with us on that jackass, and we must not leave him here to starve, for I do not think he would travel, as we direct, to get where he would find friends.

We must think quick, and be on the march. I have it. "We will take him with us. Yonder is a saddle-marked nag in that drove of mustangs capering along there. I'll go for him, and if the horse has King's brand on the shoulder, I'll rope him, and make it all right at the ranch with King as we pass."

Loosening his lasso from the horn of his saddle, Kit dashed the spurs in the flanks of his mustang, and sprung in pursuit of a drove of horses, that were, with arched necks, long flowing manes and tails, prancing around in all the wild freedom of the prairies.

Away they went, Kit in pursuit, heading them down country.

This movement being understood by the scouts, Reckless Joe took Mike behind him on the saddle, and leaving the jack half asleep, his nose nearly touching the ground, all started on down toward the fort Brown trail.

Is there a more beautiful sight in frontier life, than a drove of mustangs on the run?

The graceful curvings of neck and back, the hoofs spurning the ground with light and airy tread, distended nostrils, brilliant, flashing eyes and glossy skin—it seems a pity to enslave them by saddle or harness.

Rosa Bonheur, should she study on the plains of Texas, could paint an animal picture that would throw her former productions into the shade, even if they do stand unequalled before the world in that line of art.

Going at his horse's greatest speed, his lasso, the noose in one hand, the coil in the other with the end fastened to the horn of the saddle, his sombrero hanging from his belt by the neck-string, his long hair flying behind, and his whole attention riveted upon the horse he had decided to capture, Kit presented a picture that would have made a Camanche grunt with envy.

The distance lessens between the pursuer and pursued, the loop end of the lasso is thrown upon his own horse's back, to spread open the noose; by a dexterous twist of the wrist it circles around his head a moment, and then is thrown twenty feet through the air, with the hiss of a whip-snake. The noose rests an instant over and forward of the mustang's head, then drops, encircling the neck.

Kit's horse understands his business. As soon as the lariat has fallen over the head of the mustang, a pressure of Kit's knees, a gentle pull on the bit, and the animal's whole weight is thrown on its fore-feet, his body swings around, bringing the captured mustang to the rear, and with all fours planted to resist the shock as the mustang is brought sharp up by the tightening of the noose. The great speed with which the animal was running, the momentum which the rope attached to Kit's saddle-horn has to bear and counteract, brings Kit's horse clear from the ground forward, but the horse holds his position, and the lasso is as stiff and straight as a bar of iron. The mustang is a snorting, kicking prisoner, wild with fury and fear.

The Rangers ride up. Tom Clark's lariat cuts the air from the opposite side, and the mustang is fast between the two. Texas Bill leaps to the ground, springs for the captured horse's head, and, quick as thought, draws the tongue from the animal's mouth to hold its head; then binds a handkerchief about the eyes.

The horse is now blinded and powerless. Kit

dismounts and motions for Mike to take his place.

The lassos are loosened; the end of Kit's is fastened by a prairie twist around the under jaw of the mustang, and Kit is in an instant upon his back; the ropes are thrown clear by Tom as he leaps one side. Kit, with the lariat in his left hand, gently slips the handkerchief off with his right.

One wondering look at his captors, a quaking of his back that feels the unusual load, a wild snort, then, springing high into the air, he is off like a meteor.

Over the prairie, the quirt in the hands of Kit lashing his sides—on, on, mile after mile, until, reeking with foam and sweat, he stops, plunges, bucks, backs, lays down and rolls, only to find upon rising the same dread load upon his back.

Kit returns toward the other scouts, gives him both spurs and quirt; he recognizes a superior, a master, and is soon by the side of the boys, a subdued, or broken mustang, panting, and humble.

"He gave you a hard one, Kit, but he's a beauty," said Tom.

"Yes, he is a good nag, and gave me some trouble. He knew what was in store for him, and had a great fear of returning to his old slavery.

"I would rather rope and break two mustangs that had never felt a lariat than one who has been used by man, and let loose to run again like this one. Well, Mike, here is a horse for you."

Now, Mr. Kit, sure it's beggin' yees pardn for bein' so familia', but it's that I hears them call ye, be the howly Moses, do ye think I'd be afther trusting me life on the back of that wild, crazy divel? Sure, if he'd take the notion, God help me! where w'u'd he take me, an' no parsowan o' mine w'u'd civilize him. 'Pon me sowl I'd rather brogue it from here to the Cove-o'-Cork, barring the wather, than thry to ride him, even wid a saddle to houldt on to."

"Where is your saddle? Did your horse run off with that on his back?" asked Kit.

"Sure ye'r right! 'twas that same trick he played me. The bridle I took from his head, an' whin I went for to take the saddle he threw all four huffs at me at wonst, so I threw the bridle on the horun, and tied the rapscallion to a bit iv a plant. Me curse on that same plant, fur 'twas knives it had fur l'aves, an' one run through me hand entirely, as the blasted baste jarked on the rope."

"Well, pull on those loops behind you; loosen that blanket, and toss it over here; I will ride him until we reach King's ranch. I will then get a half-rigged saddle-tree from Mr. King, and we will fix you up and make a Ranger of you. Can you fight?"

"Fight is it! Did ye ever know an Irishman what didn't love fighting as well as whisky? Troth, there's few iv the byes iv Waterford but what's felt me stick. Bad luck to the day I lost that same! 'Twas me father owned it before me, an' many's the head its smashed, begorror!"

"But, we don't fight here like that, Mike, we shoot and cut. What do you say, Joe; don't you think our new friend will make a good Ranger?"

"Possibly, me lord! but I forbear to speak me opinion until he's made a'quaintance with the creek, cut loose the rubbish from his gills, combed out his sandy locks, and donned the hab'lments belonging to the celebrated corps you mention. From the muscular developments of the man, which, thanks to the tattered garments that partially envelop him, are open to our inspection, I should judge that much strength sleeps within his frame, and, with recuperation and proper diet—'twill not take long, judging from the extensiveness of his last meal—he will stand a man among men, and I see no reason why he could not sling a six, catch a rifle-sight quick, or pull on a rope."

"He will make a good hand in the mess, to bring wood, and water, if nothing more, after he has slathered himself in the latter," suggested Kit. "He will make fun for us—I'll bet on that; and there is something about him that I like; perhaps 'tis because he came from the land where my mother first saw light. The Irish blood in my veins warms toward him, more because he is forlorn, friendless, ragged, and suffering, and needs our kindness; he shall find a friend in me. I see he is at home with the other boys, and has them laughing at his mother-wit. Nothing except whisky will set an Irishman back, and ruffle his good humor, and it takes a good deal of that to do it. But there is a motte of live-oaks, and a water-hole near them; we had better lay by until the sun gets more to the westward. We can travel some by night, to make up for lost time."

"Your lips speak wisdom, me lord. I'm weary; give me rest; but first spread me a goodly feast; hunger is gnawing at me vitals like the fox in the Roman youth's bosom!"

"Halt, boys! I'll give you something to gnaw. Do you see that buck? Rather unusual to find one so far down the country as this. He is two hundred and fifty yards away, but I can fetch him with 'old reliable.' He'll take to his heels in about two skips, for he is snuffin' now, and will get scent of us; the breeze is that way."

Leaping from his horse, Kit took aim across the saddle; the report of his Sharpe's rifle rung out just as the buck, with a shake of his antlers sprung away; it was his last leap. As he struck the ground, his limbs gave way, and he sunk in the grass.

Kit rode to his game, drew his bowie-knife across the throat of the dying buck, proceeded to take off the hide, and cut loose for use the hind-quarters, leaving the remainder of the carcass for the wolves and buzzards.

While Kit was occupied in dressing the buck, the other scouts divested their muntsangs of saddles and bridles, rubbed down the heated backs of the animals with cool, green grass, staking them out to graze, after allowing them to drink moderately of water in the pool.

A fire was soon blazing—Mike making himself generally useful in bringing fuel, water, etc., after which he was seen taking a bath in a small pool on the opposite side of the motte and camp. A good supply of corn-bread, given them by the Rangers at Banketta Creek, was brought from the saddle-bags, and coffee was soon throwing out its fragrant aroma upon the air.

Tom Clark came in with a quarter of the venison, which was, in short meter, carved into steaks, and sputtering on sticks, over the coals.

Kit put in an appearance as the dinner was well under way, having staked his horse with the others. He threw down the buckskin, and the other hind-quarter, just as Mike came through the motte from his bath, looking much better than when begrimed with dirt and dust. As the fumes of coffee and fragrant smell of the broiling venison struck his nose, a broad grin of satisfaction appeared upon his face, and he gave vent to his joy by a wild, Irish *hurroo!*

"Troth, gentlemin, Texas isn't so haythin a counthry, afther all, whin a mon has a good, dacent wash of himself, an' the prospects iv a chance to fill his chist with slashin's iv mate fit fur a lord, the same invit'en him through his nose. God bless yees all, fur bein' friendly to a lone, starvin' Irishman; sure it's meself that'll do any thing to plaze yees, save ateing mate iv a Friday, or talkin' ill iv me native boggs."

"You are feeling good, are you, Mike?" asked Kit. "I'm glad to see it so, and you'll feel better when we get you fixed up a little. This buckskin will make you a pair of leggings, when it is properly dressed and tanned, and I'll show you how to do it. Joe, you are a brick at broiling a steak; that's the way to do it. Slip a piece of fat in between the lean; venison needs fat dripping on it, or it's too dry. It ain't like buffalo-steak; the juice or gravy isn't in it, nowow. A little bacon goes good with it, you bet!"

"I tell you what it air, Kit," said Tom Clark. "I'll be dog-goned if Joe ain't gay on a brile—just browns her to a charm, but when it cumbs ter bread of Joe's makin', I ain't ther'. Jim, here, says that up country Joe would, when he was on bread at his mess, kinder hang off till dark, foolin' around, and then go fur the creek, scoop up water, bugs, lizards, and leaves, sock in his flour, or meal, and salt, mix her up, and bake it. Joe, I don't eat bugs, an' such, often, and wheh I eat bread, I want her straight."

"Silence! caitiff. Dost take me for a dog, a slave, that thus thou wag'st thy foul tongue against me habits? Dost think me existence, me time to linger on this terrestrial sphere, is measured by the quality of the staff-of-life I choose to mix, in an accommodating way, for such base insignificant? But hold! Give me patience! Thou hast the semblance of a man; act as one, and do not, for the love you bear your stomach, so rile me temper as to spoil me appetite, or there will be a lonely, unmarked grave beside this motte. But this is too grave a subject. What, ho! me merry men! Come one, come all! Make this grub fly. Old Sol glides slowly toward the western sky!"

"Joe, I'll be gobbed by an alligator-gar, if you don't alwis make me take water, back down, and cork up. You can sling more mixed-up bosh, what nobody can't make nothin' outen, or nobody don't know nothin' about, than any corn-cake sp'iler this side of Red river. I pass! You alwis have a full hand, or mouth, I shu'd say. Just gaze at him now, Jim! Kit, is ther' any of that buck left on the perrarie, or have the kyotes gone for it? Looks like we're comin' out short, by the way Joe goes through it. Now I'll be skulped if he ain't gittin' red in the face! Don't swaller such big chunks, Joe. Feed decent; chaw the stuff; don't be skeered; I'll go and knock another buck over. Look out, Joe! Save them bones to pick yer teeth; don't sling 'em this way. Ha-ha-ha! Hold on, Joe; I'll simmer down; reckon I'll feed, too, while there's somethin' to go for."

Tom was the last to seat himself at the dinner circle to enjoy the feast of venison, corn-pone and coffee.

While the other scouts and Mike had been eating he had stepped out, seemingly to give his horse more space to feed over, by lengthening his lariat, but his real purpose was to procure a long hair from the animal's tail. In the middle of this hair he made a loop, and, taking the rattles he had cut from the snake, killed by him in the morning, from his bullet-pouch, he inserted the same in the loop and drew it tight around

the rattles. By taking one end of the hair between each forefinger and thumb, and working them with a twist movement, the exact imitation of a rattlesnake's warning could be produced.

Returning to camp, he slipped this, all prepared for use, into his pouch again, and commenced bantering Joe, as we have seen, then seated himself to satisfy the inner man.

The scouts were all hungry, after their long ride, and Mike partook of the edibles with a gusto nearly equaling his first meal.

Mike had perhaps half-satisfied his hunger—had just tore off from a toasting-stick a huge steak and taken in a prodigious mouthful, when Tom, slyly drawing from his pouch the horse-hair and rattles, took hold of each end of the hair, meanwhile drawing the attention of the party, who were all in the secret except Mike, toward the live-oaks to a bird of beautiful plumage.

The thumb and fingers of Tom gave a quick quivering twist to the hair, and the loud rattle of the pest of the prairies whirred, seemingly just behind Mike.

One wild yell of terrific fright; a scramble and leap that knocked coffee-pot, tin cups, toasting sticks and steaks in every direction, and Mike went clear over the heads of those in his front, grasped hold of one of the lower limbs of a live-oak, and in an instant was up the tree, gazing with bulging eyes, and pale features down at the scouts, who were all rolling on the ground, convulsed with laughter.

"Howly mother o' Moses, but the varmint has bit the whole uv 'em! Troth, there's nothing but pure good luck, an' bein' a divil of a laper that saved me. God help him, and Satan take the shnake! Sure it's the agonies o' death they're sufferin' an' it's here I'll have to shtay till I drap wid wakeness, for I'm doomed entirely, if I go down to be bit by the monsther."

Now and then a word of Mike's would be caught by the scouts, between their fits of laughter, which only served to make them laugh the wilder and louder, until they were actually suffering from the spasmodic mirth which they could not control. One look at Mike was enough to set them all roaring again, and they rolled and kicked about the camp, trying in vain to calm down.

"Sure an' it's a horrid death to die. God help them! They were good b'y's, an' what the devil will becum o' me now?" and crossing himself Mike began to mutter his prayers.

Tom took advantage of this, and worked his way around through the grass until he got behind the tree Mike was perched upon.

The scouts who had smothered their mirth, knowing Tom's next move, were laying silent in the grass, their backs toward Mike, not daring to look at him, for they had laughed themselves sore.

Gently Tom drew himself up on the opposite side of the trunk of the tree from Mike, and just above him.

Again the blood-curdling rattle of the deadly snake burst on poor Mike's ear, and very near to it. Mike did not have the nerve or time to turn his head. A yell in which was blended horror, deathly terror, and desperation, burst from his lips as he went tearing through the branches to the ground in a heap, but, quick as thought, he was up and off over the prairie in the direction of the horses, and in another instant he sprung clear astride of the very wild 'devil uv a horus,' Kit had roped.

The fear of the snakes had drowned all fear of anything else.

The mustang leaped around, bucked a little, but soon got to the end of his rope, and felt the twitch; then he stopped instantly, and became docile; the recent choking he had received he had not forgotten. Mike gathered his feet as high from the ground as he could with safety, and retain his seat, holding on to the horse's mane with a tight grip.

"God help me! wher' will I go if the shtake was up, and the horus loose? It's little I'd care where he'd take me, if 'twas only out o' this, where the schnakes 'll not let a mon ate his dinner in p'ace. It's little good what I did ate will do me, bedad, and 'pon me sowl, I never in all me life heard of a schnake that 'ud climb a thray."

"Be gorrah, 'twas little clothes I had upon me back, at all, an' I'll be naked as Tim Conner's pig, what fell in the vat, if this skarmishin' goes on much longer. Sure, I wonder if it's all dead they are? Troth, the varmint might 'a' spared one for company—Mr. Kit onyhow, as dacent a mon as I'll find, high or low, an' how the devil he cu'd contint himself among schnakes I can't think. 'Twas a black day fur me I left Kill-a-me-thomas, an' sure the schnakes 'll Kill-me afore I ever see it and Mary ag'in, bad luck to 'em, sure, whatever were they made fur? Thank God, an' St. Patrick, there's none in ould Ireland."

A half-dozen pistol shots now gave Mike a fresh alarm, only to be turned to joy, as he looked toward the camp, from which direction the reports had come, and discovered all the scouts on their feet and thrashing around in the grass with sticks.

A yell from Kit, for Mike to return to camp,

was not noticed by the latter, who still held for dear life to the mustang's mane, who had nearly succeeded in throwing Mike to the ground, being alarmed by the reports of the pistols.

Kit was forced to go to Mike and persuade him to return and finish his dinner, telling him the snakes were all killed.

"Sure it's yersel's I was thinkin' was kilt entirely," said Mike, as he slowly and reluctantly went back to the motte, with Kit, keeping a wandering, nervous gaze upon the grass he was to tread.

Most anybody but Mike would have noticed the half-concealed mirth which was shown plainly upon the countenances of the scouts, but he was so eagerly watching for snakes, expecting the awful warning rattle any moment, that he did not notice how the boys had suffered from an over-supply of fun.

"Are yees sure yees killed them all, Misther Kit, an' there's not a devil of a won lurking around?"

"What was yees all rolling on the grass fur, an' yellin' so harud? Faith, it's bit be the schnakes I thought yees all was, and I left alone ag'in in this cuss ev a c'unthry; I thought be this, yees wud all be dead entirely."

"Misther Kit, can a schnake climb a tree? Sure thays has no futs at all, at all."

"I reckon we killed them all, Mike. You see we were rolling around, and yelling, to frighten them away. As to their climbing trees, a very large snake can do it."

"Fakes, be the rattle ev him he was a rowser, an' a lucky mon I was to eskape him. Be the powers, he had the back ev me head in his mouth, as he laped frum the thra!"

"Well, Mike, never mind the tarnal snakes; let us finish our grub," and the scouts, almost dead with the laughing-fits they had passed through, once more seated themselves, collected the scattered repast and utensils, and finished their dinner without coffee, Mike giving an anxious look at intervals up into the branches of the live-oak, or a sudden jerk of his head backward, as a rustle of the grass struck his watchful ears.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO PRAIRIE GUIDES.

OUR friends, Jack and Clown, whom we left asleep inside the coach which was standing opposite Sappington's stable, were awakened the next morning early by the arrival of the stage from Austin City, driven by Jim Harding, who blew a merry good-morning to San Antonio on his bugle as he came within the city limits.

There wasn't an old stager within the boundaries of the Lone Star State who could put more life and vim into a bugle than Jim Harding, hold the lines or snap a whip with more grace, although he was young at the business, as well as in years.

He took great pride in his team, and when entering a town made them show to advantage.

This particular morning Jim was full inside and out, or at least his coach was, and he bowled along with his six fat and frisky nags, who made the wheels hum, and the drowsy passengers to make fresh grips, to steady themselves.

Past the stable, and the coach where our friends were reposing, or just beginning to be broken of the heavy sleep which follows drinking, to the post-office, to throw out the mails, then across the Plaza, diagonally, to Commerce street, over the bridge, and up to the Menger House, where the passengers, glad to get to the end of their long journey of eighty miles, crammed in a stage coach, crawled out in a very stiff manner and hobbled into the hotel.

The porters soon yanked the baggage all clear of the "boots," and Jim's long whip sent the team on their way to Sapp's stable to feed and lay over until the return trip.

I said that Jack was awakened by Jim's bugle.

Perhaps there was nothing upon earth, an eighty-four pound battery counted in, that would bring Jack from the world of nod quicker, or make him wider awake, than a stage-bugle.

He sat up on the back seat, rubbed his eyes, which were very badly inflamed, and not inclined to open as wide as Jack thought they ought to.

It was rather dark yet, especially inside the coach.

It seemed to Jack, after a good rubbing to no effect, that he would have to wait awhile before his eyes would be able to do their accustomed duty, so he put out his hands, and felt about him, as he could not remember his exact whereabouts. As soon as his hands came in contact with the plush, and felt the buttons behind his resting-place, he knew, immediately, where he was.

"I'm O. K.; danged if I ain't. Didn't know, for sure, where I was. Kinder keerful since I went and camped on the bridge, got up in a hurry, bein' dry, and walked inter the drink kerlumux clean over my head. I reckon I took in more water at worst than ever afore or since; had a surprise party in my stomach. Haloo! who's that snorin'? Makes as much fuss

as a bull-alligator. That must be Clown. Yes, I reckon 'tis; was with me last night.

"Let's see, what was up;" and Jack drew his legs up on the seat, clasped his hands about his knees, and commenced to think.

"Oh, yes; remember now; row at the fandang'; shootin', an' cuttin', an' I'm danged if I don't think Clown and me swore off on whisk'; and here I am with cobwebs clean down to my gizzard. Oh, yes; Clown! wake up and h'ist yourself outer that boot or I'll bu'st yer bugle."

"I want yer right here, afore Jim drives up from the Menger. None yer shenanagin now; projuce yerself!"

The snoring ceased; a rumbling and kicking issued from the stage-boot; a scramble, an oath or two, delivered with marked emphasis, and then the heavy fall of some weighty body to the ground.

"Well! I'll just be dog-goned if you don't make more fuss about gittin' out of bed than Jim Dudley does drivin' down the Gaudaloupe ford. What the devil's up, or down, with yer, Clown? Yer feel kinder top-heavy, I reckon, as I do myself. Crawl in here afore Jim Harding drives up; rub yer bruises inside here, and next time look where yer drivin'."

Faint streaks of light shot up from the eastward, lightening up things so the boys could see each other.

"You are the dangest lookin' cuss of a Clown I ever did see, but, let's talk this thing over. I want to know, fustly, if we really and truly did swear off takin' any more whisk', last night?"

"I'm sorry to say—I'm cussed sorry to say—that we did, Jack. We were a pair of fools to drink so much, fustly, and a dang sight worse fools to swear off takin' any more, not even countin' in a few fingers in a tapering way."

"Well, it's settled, then, that we did swear off; the next question is, air a man or men responsible, or can a person be held on an oath taken when he's just a-b'ilin' over with p'ison? That's what must be decided; cussed quick, too."

"I don't kno' nothin' about law, Jack; reckon we'd better wait for Jim; he knows a heap about everything. If he don't come mighty quick, I reckon I'll be forced ter decide it, one way or the other, myself."

"What's that on the bottom of the coach, Clown? A snake? take care. Don't touch the tarnal thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Jack. Yer wuss gone 'n I thought. That's a halter. If that sw'arin' wa'n't good last night, I rec'on we'd better make it good—try her over—that is, after we have had two or three good straighteners to keep the cracks closed in our brain-boxes."

"Now yer talkin', Clown; now yer suit me. Yes, I rec'on we will do that same. Halloo! here's Jim. Blest if he ha'n't got twelve hitched on, a double-lashed whip, and his twin brother along with him! Curse that double-barreled whisky! How de do, Jim! What's the news? Good news? How de feell?"

"Well! I'll never crack another whip or pull another line if you boys ain't the hardest-looking pair I've seen since I drove on the Pacific slope among the Digger Injuns."

"You can bet your last bit that we look a blamed sight better'n we feel. Let the stable boys unhitch and shove yerself this way. I want you for a few fleeting periods."

"What's up, Jack? You look as though you'd been playing Mazeppa, cords broke loose, and you got a drag. Where you boys been since I drove in last? Acrost the Staked Plains?"

"Never you mind where we've bin; but, look-a-here; you shet up, Clown! I'll put it to Jim, square. Now, Jim, Clown and I, after we cleaned out the fandang' last night—lively time, by the way—you see, Clown had been huntin' with Bob Caile, Shipley, and Bill Rodgers. That's enough for you, I rec'on, to know bout how he was, and I was rather so, so, I admit. Well, like a pair of fools we swore off pourin' down any more p'ison—'twas out ther' on the Plaza, by moonlight (rather dull moonlight, wa'n't it, Clown?) not very bright, no! We swore off on 'count of a trip to the Rio Grande that won't admit of fluids of strong character. Now, Jim, we're just dead fur a drink. I see jim-jams ahead, sure, unless I taper; couldn't stand a sudden haul up; wreck my coach, anyhow. This are the question; are them oaths we took bindin' on us, situated as we were, excited, full of p'ison, it not bein' very light at the time, and no Bible nearer'n the cathedral, an' we not believin' in that?"

"Well, boys, I've knocked around amid the confines of this continent considerable, but I must say I never drove against two such consummate fools as you are, to hang around here, blue about the gills for a drink, and not go and get it. I don't pretend to know much about law, but I think it would be a highfalutin old court that would take any evidence on oath from a man when he's drunk. I wouldn't give a pickayune for your oaths."

"Hold on, Jim, that's enuf; that's talkin'; I slip over all the hard gab you've slung at us; a feller is bound to take almost anything when he's dry that's got the vim to it. Here! put her right there. Shake, pard, and keep it

there until I get outer this coach. Come on, Clown! Jim, you're the most sensible cuss that ever sprung a brake or snapped a whip. Easy! I'm shaky on the pins. Kinder loose everywhere. Two or three drinks'll fetch me up O. K. Jim, did yer see anything of Scott or Jim Dudley this trip, or Green? But, dang the odds, if yer did or not just now; some other time I'll talk of them. Let's just h'ist ourselves for Bob's."

And, arm in arm, Jim in the middle, they turned the corner of the Main Plaza, and were soon at Bob Caile's bar.

"Lingswider!" said Jack, "you just hustle yerself around here lively, and mix Clown and me the stiffer cocktails you ever decocted within the extended term of years in which you have distributed fluids. I don't know what you want, Jim; spit her out. If it's champagne 'twon't set me back. I'd take it myself if it would take the pain outer my upper works. Slap 'em up, George, I'm powerful thirsty, and Van Wells will be knockin' around soon, counting my drinks. He says I can chamber more'n any man in San Antone, except John Armstrong. Old Cap. was shot here yesterday, Jim, but you'll hear of more shootin' to-day that come off last night, I rec'on. But, here we are! Here's yours, Clown. Takin' ginger-pop, are ye, Jim? Well, s'pose you got to sleep to-day to be fresh next trip. Here's fun. I hope it'll make us feel better, Clown."

And the boys poured down their drinks, sat the empty glasses upon the bar, and Jack wiped off his mouth with his sleeve, saying:

"That goes to the right spot; if it'll only stay there I'm hunk. I'll walk up and down the bar, Clown, you sling the news at Jim; I don't feel like talkin' just now. I want this drink to stay where I put it. There goes George Horner. Come near buttin' right ag'in' that post; he'll have to wear goggles soon or burst his bugle."

And Jack walked up and down the bar-room, thinking of his proposed trip to the Rio Grande, of his word given to Miss Martha Wells that he would escort her through—of how he was going to make things come out smoother and give up drinking—of his broken pledge, which rather rankled in his conscience, notwithstanding Jim Harding's decision. Jack had not the remotest idea of letting rum interfere with his arrangements with Martha Wells, and he resolved to take just enough to steady him, get a good, rare beef-steak and cup of strong coffee, then go and see her.

Clown, with some varnishing, told Jim in regard to the shooting scrape at the fandango, and by the time he was through, Jack had come to the conclusion that his first drink was going to stay by him; they took another to keep it company; then all adjourned to the Plaza House, and told Bill Miller, the clerk, to order them a good breakfast; after which Jim Harding retired to sleep, being fatigued after driving all night.

Clown and Jack, feeling like new men, went to Clown's room, spruced up and shaved, then went to the residence of the Widow Wells.

Martha met them at the door with a warm greeting, and Mrs. Wells bustled around to seat them.

"Jack, I am so glad to see you; and you, also, Clown. I have been expecting you some time, but suppose I am very impatient. I hope, Clown, you will go with us. Jack has, of course, told you what we propose to do?"

"Yes, Miss Martha; I am ready at a minute's notice to serve you, and reckon we can go through safe, with good horses."

"Certainly, Miss Martha; Clown will go anywhere with me, and is always ready to do a good turn to the ladies. He is a great friend of your mother's."

"Yes," said Mrs. Wells, "I have known Clown longer than I have you, Jack, and although I think it a very dangerous undertaking, that Martha proposes, I do not know of any two men in the State I would trust her with, and feel more confident of protection, than to you."

"They would have to kill us both, Mrs. Wells," answered Jack, "before they could harm her, be they Greasers, outlaws, or Indians; but we must fix things, come to an understanding, as to the start, and tricks to take with us, right away. I propose we start right from here at ten o'clock to-night, cross the river at the old ford, by the foot-bridge, pass General Twiggs' house, and down the river trail, as though we were a-going toward the coast, instead of across country. Then we will recross the river at San Jose, strike through the musquitos to the Medina. By so doing we will, if any one sees us, who would work us harm, put them on the wrong scent. Clown and myself will be ready here at ten, sharp. We will have arms, ammunition, provisions, coffee-pot, tin cups, and frying-pan—each taking a pair of large saddle-bags. You better not load your horse enough to bother you, Miss Martha. Will you be ready?"

"Oh, yes, Jack, I shall be ready at the time you appoint. I think you show excellent judgment in your plans. I am so glad you have arranged to get off so soon. I shall never forget your kindness, gentlemen, and hope to repay it, sometime."

"Now, that is enough of that kind of talk,

Miss Martha; but we must bid you good-morning. Mary, I suppose, is at school. Mrs. Wells, don't you worry; we will take good care of Miss Martha. We have so many things to do, to get ready, that we must be at work."

"I wish you could stop longer, Jack, but suppose you have much to attend to. I shall hope and pray for you all the time you are gone," said Mrs. Wells, as she bade good-morning to Jack and Clown, at the door.

The two tipped their sombreros and walked toward the stable.

"Clown, what kinder specimens of gentlemen do yer think Miss Martha w'u'd 'a' thought us had she peeped into our coach lodgin'-house this mornin'? Look-a-here, Clown, as long as you travel with me, don't yer 'low me to git so full of whisky ag'in. You just lead me into a stall, tie me up, hobble me, but don't let me guzzle like that ag'in. Makes me feel way down below folks more so than I am; I'm glad we are goin' into decent company, and where rum are scarce, ain't you, old boy?"

"Can't say but what I am, but I shall take a bottle along, for I know how you'll feel ag'in tomorrow mornin'."

Ten o'clock, rather a dark night it was, and being so, was more favorable for our friends to make the start for the Rio Grande.

The cathedral bell had just ceased its gloomy clamor when Jack and Clown dismounted, loosened the ropes, from the loops of their saddle-horns, and entered the gate of Mrs. Wells' residence, still holding on the lariats, attached to the necks of two fiery mustangs that pawed and stamped the sward by the fence.

But a dim light shone through the Venetian blinds, as they stepped up to the door, and gave a gentle tap. The door swung open noiselessly; the dreamy light of a single candle cast its hazy rays from the back portion of the apartment, and in its doubtful light, by the doorway, stood Miss Martha, attired in a beautifully embroidered suit of buckskin, ornamented profusely with silver buttons along the seams, which were also deeply fringed; a soft sombrero, one side looped up with a five-pointed silver star, and a long black plume gracefully drooping behind—that all gave a brigandish look to her supple, graceful form.

A Sharpe's carbine, slung from her shoulder by a strap, made up, with her high-legged riding-boots, and long-roweled Mexican spurs, a regular Ranger rig.

Her hair being cut even with her shoulders, and skin darkened, she did not look any more feminine than many of the boy Rangers then in the service of the State.

Her mother, with tears flowing, and sobbing convulsively, came with her, to bid good-by to the boys and a long farewell to her daughter.

"Take good care of my girl, Jack and Clown, and bring her back to me safe. God bless you, and protect you, from all harm!"

A silent shaking of hands all around, and Martha, too full of grief at parting, and the sight of her mother's tears, to speak, stepped around the house, and in another instant appeared before them, mounted on White Cloud, for the road.

Quickly, Jack and Clown recoiled the ropes, looped them to the saddle-horns, mounted, and all three dashed down the street.

San Antonio was, at that time, frequented by vagrant Mexicans, and outlaws, only too eager to take advantage of any party starting out from the town, who were not strong enough to hold their own against them; hence the silence and precaution used by our friends.

The ford was past; the now silent old undershot water-wheel, covered with slime and moss, was left behind. Past the residence of General Twiggs, and they were soon in the down-river trail, among the musquits.

"Spur up, Miss Martha; we must make the next eight miles in short time. Come on, Clown!"

Dashing the spurs home into the flanks of their horses, they bounded on like the wind, down past San Juan and Horse Shoe Bend. On, on, in a wild gallop, and they came, inside of half an hour, to Granger's Ranch, just across from San Jose.

"Halt!" Short and quick came the command from the lips of Jack, and the three stood opposite a small, deserted log-cabin, with thatched roof, and one side open to the weather.

"I never pass here, Miss Martha, without stopping, and looking at that little cabin. Who do you suppose built it?"

"I could not say, Jack," answered Miss Martha.

"Well, I'll tell you. Two years ago two boys, who came away from Leominster, Massachusetts—I never have been ther', but I know it's way up north, a thousand leagues, I rec'on—their heads full of romance and love of adventure, located here, felled the trees, and built that little cabin. They lived there six weeks, then the Indians came within five miles from here, and murdered and mutilated men, women and children. The boys, who had previous to this thought a good deal of the noble Red-man, (been readin' Cooper, I rec'on) got a sight of the scene of the massacre, and that just satisfied them about Mr. Lo.; they broke up house-

keeping, shouldered their rifles, walked to San Antonio, bought horses, bridles, blankets and tricks, joined the Rangers under Capt. Burleson, and have been a-fighting for the State since, I rec'on. You ought to guess who they were by this time.

"Oh, Jack, I am so glad you came this way. I never could find the cabin, and have looked often. I have heard so much of the boy rancheros, the boy Rangers, Buckskin Sam and Reckless Joe, even before I knew them personally. I love every log in the dear little cabin."

"Yes, I know all that, but we must dash on. Nobody thinks any more of those boys than Jack; but we have long miles before us," and again the trio galloped through the river bottom, crossed the ford past the dark gloomy walls of San Jose, and entered the musquits, that stretch to the Medina river.

They now took an easy gait, having done all they could to throw any enemy off their trail.

"Well, Miss Martha; I hope the brisk ride hasn't set you back any. We better camp on the Medina, below the ford, in the bottom timber, where nobody will notice us, and have a rest, as you will have to make long stages after we get beyond the oak openings and on the open prairies that lay out flat to the Nueces river."

"I do not feel tired, Jack; I often take a gallop down to San Jose, of an evening, for exercise, but we will camp whenever and wherever you choose. You are chief of scouts, in this command. How do you feel, Clown?"

"Well, Miss Martha, I have never felt what you may call well since I was shot to pieces by the Reds, but I make out to get through whenever chance sends me, somehow. I'm more at home now than in San Antonio. I don't feel easy among the houses. The prairies for me, every time!"

"I do not blame you for loving the plains and woods. Nature has charms which no one with any poetry or religion in his nature can but reverence and admire. The works of God throw the pigmy efforts of man into insignificance. The mountains, canons, prairies, rivers, woods, rocks and streams, have all their separate wonders and beauties, to say nothing of the various varieties of birds, beasts, fish and insects that are found in or about them. But how dark it seems in these musquit thickets. I do not understand how you can possibly know where you are going, Jack, for I see no stars to guide you to-night."

"I know every inch of this country, Miss Martha; we are now in a more clear trail, and can lope a little faster. We'll soon get to good grass and water. My head feels kinder funny; haven't slept much of late. What yer laughin' and gruntin' 'bout, Clown? You can't say but what you have had your regular rations of sleep. Miss Martha, we shall have to run a lasso noose around his nose, and draw her tight every night, or he will bring a war-party down on us; he can out-snore any bull alligator in Buffalo Bayou."

"Don't you fret, Jack; I know when I'm on the plains, and when I'm in town. I never snore when it would be dangerous, and when I wake up I generally know where I am, and don't have to feel around and scratch my head to get my exact locate!"

"See here, Clown, you make more fuss about a little thing than a rattlesnake in dog-days, and your speech are about as p'ison as its breath. Were you playin' off sleep yesterday mornin'?"

"I'll leave that for you to guess, Jack; but what's up with you, now? Ride on if you don't see nothin'; if yer do, say so, and what it is!"

"I'll just bet my life I see three—well, never mind; ride up, Clown! Miss Martha, you drop behind a minute."

As Clown rode up to Jack, he was asked by the latter, in a hurried whisper, if he did not notice something wrong just ahead to the right. Clown spurred up through the brush, but found nothing to attract his attention.

"What in thunder's the matter, Jack? What'd yer think yer see?"

Jack leaned over on his horse, and whispered in Clown's ear, "Three Reds, I'll bet my sculp!"

"That's danged nonsense. If there had 'a' been yer couldn't 'a' seen 'em here; yer getten' flighty ag'in. Take a snifter outer this bottle; it'll fetch yer out hunk, for a while."

The gurgle, gurgle of the liquor, as it flowed down Jack's throat, was drowned to the ears of Martha Wells by the swashing of the branches as they were parted by the horses' legs.

"Now, Clown, you just bet that's gay. Right to the spot she went, thank ye. Yer the most sensible cuss I ever knocked around with. Mustn't let Miss Martha know nothin' about my bein' shaky; mum's the word. Ride up, Miss Martha!" sung out Jack, feeling much better after taking a nip. Ride up between us; the trail, such as it are, widens here."

Miss Wells came dashing up between her two protectors.

"There are two things that bother me on the start, Miss Martha, muchly," said Jack.

"I assure you, Jack, it is a surprise to me to hear you say anything bothers you, for you are always apparently happy. What seems to trouble you?"

"Don't you believe yourself; my face, as everybody's, contains a great deal that is false in it. When I am happy, or look so, I am sometimes blue; and now I am powerfully taken back by your havin' a white horse; it seems unlucky to me. The Reds, or Greasers, or anybody, for that matter, what's got eyes can see a white horse in the night, when a bay, brown or black would not be seen at all, and if I had only thought, you could have ridden a black of mine that's over to Charley Pyron's ranch, or at least we are now right on his range, but it's too late to make the change."

"Well, Jack, there is one consolation; if they do see White Cloud they will have a hard time of it to catch him if I am riding him. There are but few horses his equal for speed and endurance."

"It's a good thing to make a long or fast run, but it's a better thing to avoid both on a long trail. Howsomever, I hope things will come out bunk. In spite of myself, Miss Martha, I can't help from biting off my words and using slang; it's hard enough in tow, but worse in the bush. I can talk as straight as a West Pointer, or any other waxed-mustached galoot, but I scorn to do it. I always try in the presence of ladies, but you see that's not often, or long at a time."

"Don't you curb your tongue for me, Jack. When you are on the prairies, do as the prairie-men do."

"Now, you please me muchly, for I have caught you using a stable word. The other thing you haven't asked me about. What bothers me is calling you Miss Martha; you are acting as a man, and make a splendid-looking one, I must admit. We must get up a name to fit you in your new character. What do you say to 'Young Reliable.' You carry an 'Old Reliable' rifle, and I'm so used to them, and Clown, too, we will be able to catch at the name quick. Suppose we call you Rely, for short?"

"I have no objections to the name, Jack, but shall have to rely upon you to put me in mind of it at times; I may lose my identity."

"Oh, you will soon get used to the name, and it is necessary, for various reasons. Here we are in tall timber; the river isn't a hundred yards away, and we have struck the gully where I intended. We can make a fire without its being seen. We'll ride in, unsaddle, and take our nags out to grass among the musquits."

Just at the foot of a huge pecan tree, the saddles, tricks and traps were deposited.

Rely (as we must in future call Miss Wells), refused all assistance, and was ready with her nag as soon as the boys, showing that she was used to taking care of her horse. Jack took his own and Rely's animal, and leaving Rely to see to the camp, went out to find a good grazing spot, followed by Clown, leading his mustang.

They soon found suitable places, gave the animals good length of rope to get plenty of grass, and started on the return.

"Look-a-here, Jack; do you see any more Indians or snakes, or do yer winkers quiver any? If so, take another pull at the root of all evil. What's in that bottle has got to straighten us up, you know. You just gobble down all the fat bacon and strong coffee you can; they're good for ye; an' I'll give yer a chance ter sleep, by standin' the fust watch till about two o'clock. I'm too nervous myself to sleep, and don't care to. Often go two or three nights without sleep. When you wake up I hope you'll know where you are."

Jack took a long pull at the bottle, and withdrew the same from his lips, as Clown's speech ended.

"See here, Clown; yer better cork up on that trail; haul in yer slack tongue or yer might get boosted."

"I'm agoing to cork up right here, and you don't get another drink until we start off in the mornin', and it must be early, too, to clear the houses afore they're up. If yer go to gettin' at all sassy, I'll bu'st the bottle."

"Now don't do that, pard; some on us might get snake-bit. I feel that way in my bones. I'm just as mum as a mummy. Save the bottle and what's in it; that's a good pard."

By this time they came to the tree where Rely sat with the saddles. A fire was soon made and a midnight lunch eaten; then the scouts formed a bower of branches to shield Rely from the heavy dew, and she lay down to rest, and Jack, also, at the head of the gully, while Clown meandered back and forth between the sleepers and the horses, the owls hooting over his head, the distant bark of the coyotes, and the faint ripple of the river being the only breaks to the stillness of the night.

CHAPTER VII.

RESACA DE LA PALMA—A DASTARDLY DEED.

The western waves of ebbing day
Rolled o'er the glen their level way;
But not a setting beam could glow
Within the dark ravines below.
The wanderer's eye could barely view
The summer heaven's delicious blue,
So wondrous wild, the whole might seem,
The scenery of a fairy dream.

FOUR days after we left our scouts encamped at the post-oak motte, and where Mike O'Keefe

had enough rattlesnake experience to last him for a long time, we overtake them away down country.

The boys had made good time, and Mike got so he could ride the "devil ev a horus." A red woolen shirt, given him by Kit, with the leggings from the buck hide, gave him a somewhat better appearance than when we last saw him, but the want of a sombrero was felt badly, as he had nothing to shield his head from the hot sun except a handkerchief.

Our scouts, after a long day's ride, begrimed with dust, weary and worn, were just entering the dark shades of chaparral, that border on the Resaca de la Palma; to their left, and eastward stretched the prairie battlefield of Palto Alto, the rank grass growing over the graves of Mexican and American soldiers. They soon penetrated the chaparrals and were in the cool shade of palms, on the banks of the chain of water-holes, too sluggish to be called a stream.

Although the sun shone hot upon the plain beyond, and overhead, not one single ray penetrated the dense foliage of palms and rank creepers that strove to smother the trees upon which they depended for support.

The horses were unsaddled immediately, rubbed down, and allowed to drink; then Mike and Tom Clark proceeded up-stream to find an opening for them to graze, while the other scouts proceeded to make a fire and prepare the meal so much needed by them after the long ride. Large numbers of waterfowl were in the waters of the Resaca, and were so tame they were enabled to knock them over by crawling up to the rushes; so they had a change from their regular bill of fare, and a bountiful repast was before the fire in a short time.

They were now within six miles of Fort Brown, right in the lurking places of Cortinas stragglers, where these bandits pounced upon those leaving or entering the fort, murdering and robbing them. Mike and Tom Clark had perhaps been gone with the horses fifteen minutes, when the scouts by the fire were brought to their feet by a wild yell from Mike, who came tearing through the brush like a madman, his face pale as death with terror, and fell in a heap within the camp, speechless with fear, and trembling like an aspen.

Kit took him by the collar and sat him up against a tree, giving him a good shake.

"What's up now, Mike? Spit it out, quick, or I'll choke it out of you. Where's Tom, and what have you seen?"

The scouts grasped their rifles and Mike came in, and now stood eagerly watching the point from which he came, expecting an attack from that quarter, or danger in some form.

Mike gave a heavy sigh, turned his face up the creek, the horror still photographed there, his eyes still gazing or glaring with a dreadful anticipation. At last he found his tongue, and holding the leg of Kit with a tight grasp, as though he was his only savior, he broke out:

"Be the great God abuv' us, Mr. Kit, show me out o' this and don't be afther askin' me what I've seen; sure it's nothin' w'u'd make me fale, as I'm after falin' at this present moment, but murther. Masha, my God, what's that? Horooh, it's Mister Tom, safe and sound. Heaven be praised, an' it's himself that can tell yees the tale o' blood that lays yondher. God spare me such another sight like that same so long as me name's Mike O'Keefe!"

At this juncture Tom Clark came in sight, parting the brush with both hands, and showed a countenance equally as pale as Mike's, but devoid of the terror that individual had manifested, but in its place, acting in brotherhood with the set teeth, was a stern determination—a most startling combination of hatred and unsatisfied revenge, that told something of more than unusual moment had come over him.

He did not advance to the camp, but stood there, gazing at his brother scouts.

"By all the Gods of ancient Greece what means this mystery? Art thou me father's ghost? If so, await the mystic hour of midnight before thou haunt'st me vision!" exclaimed Reckless Joe.

Tom turned on his heel and faced the thicket from which he had just emerged, giving the same beckoning gesture made by the ghost in Hamlet, but there was no show of burlesque in his manner; the same singular blend of look rested upon his countenance.

"Unhand me, slaves! I'll follow thee if to me death. What 'tis I can't conceive, but seeing is to believe," cried Joe.

"Jim Bearfield, stay by the camp. We'll see what this means. For the life of me, I cannot understand what's up. Come on, boy!" commanded Kit.

Seeing that Tom did not come into camp for his Sharpe's rifle, they knew no immediate danger threatened, and so only took their side arms.

They crashed through the brush for ten minutes, Tom preceding them but a few paces, when a very singular voice, for that secluded chaparral, broke upon their ears. It was that of a young lad, a wild, weird wail, a monotonous chant, that sounded through the chaparrals, and it ran, as far as words went, in this wise:

"Whoa, Nig! Get up along, Spot! What yer

doin' there, Whitey?" repeated again and again.

This refrain sung, or wailed, in so strange a manner, in so strange a place, by so youthful a voice, was, as Reckless Joe muttered, "passing strange."

Tom gave a warning hiss, from between his teeth, as he parted the brush; the scouts followed, and found themselves on the margin of one of the many openings frequent in the chaparrals, they being without tree or bush, covered with rich musquit grass, and favorite places for camping.

When the scouts broke through the branches, and all stood together by the side of Tom, a sight was spread before them that sent the blood from their faces, and left them blanched as death—a sight that sent a thrill of horror through their frames—a sight that would be photographed upon their brains as long as life lasted, were it a thousand years.

Not fifteen feet from them lay the swollen, mutilated corpse of a man, covered with blood and clotted gore, the clothing torn in shreds from his mangled form; but this was a sight too common to these men to cause the feelings so plainly stamped upon their faces.

There, upon the dead, sun-bloated corpse of the man, sitting astride of it, was his little son, seven years of age, blood oozing from a stab in the little fellow's temple, from a gash in his breast, and another in his wrist.

The poor suffering lad had torn away his clothing, in his agony, nearly to nakedness; the blood had flowed freely from his wounds, and dried upon his person, by the hot sun, presenting a horrible contrast to the white, delicate skin, made more livid by the loss of his life-giving fluid.

He held a whip in his hand, one end of the staff resting upon the ground, being too weak to hold it up, and gazed at the scouts with a vacant stare of insanity, as he kept up his unearthly chant: "Whoa, Nig! Get up along, Spot! What yer doin' there, Whitey?" striving in vain to lash his oxen, that lay dead and swollen but a few feet from him.

Silent as death were the chaparrals; not a zephyr caused the tremble of a leaf; a score of filthy buzzards were gorging themselves upon the entrails of the oxen, which they had extracted from the animals by an art, aided by instinct entirely their own; a pack of coyotes slunk cowardly from the opening into the shadows of the bush; ten thousand buzzing flies hovered around the fast decaying carcasses of the animals, and a horrid, sickening stench filled the hot, hazy air.

The scouts stood riveted to the spot, tears streaming down their cheeks—a strange sight for such men to be seen in tears—while the same monotonous chant of the wounded insane boy, guarding the dead body of his murdered father from the wolves, trembled in quivering tones upon the air: "Whoa, Nig! Get up along, Spot! What yer doin' there, Whitey?" and each and every cry, or sigh of pain, or puff of his breath, sent out a thin spray of blood from the wound in his breast, showing the lungs were penetrated.

Gently as women the scouts stepped up to the maniac child, and took the whip from his feeble grasp, raised him carefully from his father's corpse, and laid him in the shade, on the border of the opening. The murder must have been committed twenty-four hours before. The boy must have been left for dead, but had recovered and watched over his father's body, without food or water for that time, which was enough to have driven him mad, had he not been wounded. These were the conclusions of the scouts at a glance. Bill Mann brought water in his hat, and bathed the young lad and sent a stream down his throat; the other scouts left him in Bill's care; the thing now in order was, who were the murderers? Kit made his plans quickly.

"Step easy, boys! Bill George, you go back to camp for a blanket to carry the poor lad in on. Joe, you streak it right across the opening. Tom Clark, you circuit the south, and Jim Bearfield, you lay around on the north. Now, boys, do your best looking for signs; don't pass a single spear of grass that talks trail. I'll see to things here about the wagon."

All separated to gather evidence of the murderers; the opening was a book which they must read.

Kit had not been ten minutes about the wagon and the dead—which were stripped of everything of value—when he found, under an old saddle blanket, evidently left by mistake, a beautifully embroidered buckskin jacket, with a gold hilted stiletto, engraved with the name of Jose Garcia.

There were, also, two letters in the pocket, written in Spanish, which Kit secured about his person, not having time to peruse them, as he had formed ideas in regard to the jacket which altered his plans.

An imitation of the cry of the chaparral cock issued from his lips, and in an instant the other scouts rejoined him.

"No need of any further investigation, boys; this is the work of Cortina's sneaks; and the cutthroat that left this jacket and knife behind

isn't a-going to lose them for a day's ride; he will be here after them this eve, by dark. Joe Booth, you and Tom Clark lay low in that wagon, with your Colt's sixes, and don't let anything that comes into this opening that looks or smells Greaser go out a aim. They'll be sure to be smoking cigarettes, there is such a bad odor here, and that'll give you a chance for sure shots."

Tom and Joe crawled under the wagon cover, to watch for their inhuman game, and Kit and the other scouts tenderly bore the wounded boy upon the blanket to the camp.

Laying him carefully upon a mossy bank they gently bathed his wounds. To their horror they found that the flies had blown the wounds, and maggots were crawling in and out of the stabs in head and breast. They dressed the wounds in a primitive manner and water was kept dropping upon them.

His moaning cry to his oxen—he was wont to assist his father to drive—was still kept up, but in a fainter voice, and it was plain to see he had not many hours to live.

The untasted meal lay drying up by the camp-fire; the scouts bent over the dying boy, hoping his reason would return before death. The darkness beneath the palms became more dense, for the sun had sunk into the western sea, and by the flickering rays of the fire the scouts still watched the little sufferer.

His moans ceased, and his faint breath came and went, with hardly a tremor, as the quick, sharp detonations of several revolver shots sounded loudly through the chaparrals from the direction of the scene of the murder.

As the first reports, almost together, broke the awful stillness of the camp, the boy gave a wild cry of horror, sprung into the air, and fell a corpse at the feet of the watchers.

"Come on for the wagon, boys; all's over with the poor lad. Come on for veng'ance. There's more'n one Greaser come for the jacket, and the boys may want help," were Kit's words.

The scouts sprung through the now dark chaparrals toward the wagon in which Joe and Tom had awaited the return of the Mexicans for the jacket and knife.

As they neared the scene of the murder, a bright light broke upon them, showing them their way, and when they reached the opening the wagon was in a blaze, while Joe and Tom were galloping around upon the horses, with fine silver-mounted saddles and bridles upon them.

The scouts from the camp stopped on the border of light in astonishment, and Tom and Joe, seeing them, rode up to their comrades.

"Where the devil did you get them horses, and how came the wagon on fire, boys?" asked Kit.

"We swapped saltpeter and lead, blind, and lit the wagon to see if we got a barg'in," answered Tom.

"Gentlemen," said Reckless Joe, "no doubt you have often heard me remark, 'I'd give me kingdom for a horse.' I take it back. I have one, without sacrificing me paternal patrimony. There's a steed, boys, that'll take me over the mountains, and through the green shade. I owe that Greaser a debt that'll never be paid."

"Where are yer Greasers, and how many did you take in, out of the wet?" Kit demanded.

"There's just three on 'em. You'll find one horse with ours; he stampeded that way. They are all sittin' cosy on the wagon-box—took an inside seat that w'u'd just please Jack Hodge if he were here. Wait till the blaze flares a little and you'll see 'em. We thought we'd give 'em a foretaste of the climate they'll have ter scout in fur the future. One cuss made his will; left his togs—decent ones they are—to our Mike. I explained his situation to him. Tip-top sombrero counted in. I say, Joe, I'll beat yer across the opening for anything from four bits to a slug."

"Your bets are suitable for the vulgar herd; I never consider anything less than a league of Texas land when I make a wager. I tell you 'twould not pay upon an em'ty stomach. I'm famished, and no varlet bids me to the feast," was Joe's response.

The wagon being an old one, of heavy oak frame, blazed high into the sky for a long time, but at last collapsed into a smoldering heap of red-hot coals, in which the bodies of the Mexican robbers and murderers were charred to a-hes.

Slowly and sadly the scouts left the opening, after cutting branches to cover the body of the murdered ranchero from the hot sun, and also from the wolves and buzzards that would have enough to satisfy them for some days devouring the oxen. They intended to procure tools at Fort Brown, and bury the body as soon as possible.

The dead boy lay white and rigid, on the mossy bank of the Resaca de la Palma—the palms drooping over him.

Kit stood by the head of the corpse and motioned the scouts to stand around the body.

"Now, gentlemen, Texans! swear with me over this little form, now silent in death—murdered innocence, that henceforth, when we meet this guerrilla, Cortina, or any of his cut-throat band, we will remember this cowardly

act of barbarity. Keep the dying scene of this young lad, who did suffer a thousand deaths before our minds, and show no quarter, no mercy to the bandits of the Rio Grande."

The scouts, with uncovered heads, raised their right hands over the dead boy, and out on the still dark air of the chaparrals, with terrible earnestness and deep meaning, rung out the words—*We swear!*

"Now, pards, we will roll his cold form in a blanket, and lay him in this cosy nook, until we go to Fort Brown in the morning. We can carry him there and give him Christian burial."

A silent gloom fell over the party. Even Reckless Joe, as they eat their simple prairie meal, had nothing to remark, who was always the life of the party. Not one there had a more tender heart, but he showed it more in actions than words.

Poor Mike, completely exhausted by his long day's ride, had slept by the big palm trunk soundly through all the bustle, but awoke as the scouts were rolling the corpse of the child in the blanket, and occupied his time until the eating commenced, in alternately muttering his prayers and cursing the Mexican devils for murdering a poor infant.

The scouts, after satisfying their hunger, rolled and lit their cigarettes, while Kit, who did not use the weed in any form, drew the letters from his pocket which he had taken from the Mexican's jacket, and commenced to peruse them. Suddenly he sprung to his feet.

"To horse, boys! to horse! quicker'n greased lightning! They've formed a plot to assassinate Col. Ford at Fort Brown to-night. The Greaser bloodhounds are even now on the way from Cortina's camp to the fort. Spring for the nags! We must be in Brown inside this hour, or 'Old Rip,' the Chaparral Cock of the Rio Grande, is lost to Texas forever."

"Bring me horse! me kingdom for me horse! I would not that I should be absent, at such a time as this, for forty kingdoms," said Joe, as the scouts sprung through the chaparrals to the grazing place of the animals.

"'Pon me sowl," said Mike, as he scrambled through the brush, tearing himself with the many thorns, "I never heard tell ev such doin's, let alone bein' mixed wid 'em meself. T'under and ownes, a man can nathar slape or ate for the horrible scares he gets. Troth, when yeas are not watchin' to preserve yer life from Ingins or Grazers, bad luck to 'em, it's every kind ev bug an' reptile that's after yeas."

"Good-by, ould Ireland, an' Kill-a-me-Thomas; me eyes'll never have the pleasure of gazin' at yer green bogs ag'in. Sure me sister Mary'd cry herself dead, entirely, ev she was asther knowin' the fix I'm in."

"Howly mother o' Moses! sure I'd not be surprised at all sh'u'd I never ag'in see daylight. Whar in t'under is me devil ev a horus? It's asther bein' dark as seven Augepts, an' it's me luck to get a good kick from the spaldeen wid all four ev his futs. Mighty good min they have here, if it is a cuss of a country, fur they'll go to the devil through darkness and blood for a friend; and I'm thinkin' Mike O'Keefe was never in better company. Here yeas are, ye ugly devil! Come wid me! Sure it's a sorrow to take yeas from such foine grass, but yeas have to go, fur Tom Cornell is in danger ev his life. I'm to be hung if I know ev any one who isn't in the same fix around here. Come on, be gorroor! if the b'ys sh'u'd l'ave me behind wid the dead folks, the darkness, and devil knows what, I'd die entirely, wid fright. Will yeas come along? Be the sowl ev me drowned uncle, I'll l'ave yeas behind wid the fairies, if yeas don't hasten!"

Poor Mike, half-frightened to death by his unusual surroundings, was the last to reach camp. The scouts were all saddled up, and Kit assisted him for the road.

"All set! All hunk! Come on, boys! Easy, until we strike the Fort Brown trail, then we will git up and dust."

In five minutes they were in the wagon-trail, and dashing like mad toward Fort Brown, the clattering hoofs causing many a wandering coyote to slink into the dark thickets.

"Charge! Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on! were the last words of Marmion. I wonder what mine will be?" said Joe.

"I'll go a slug, they'll be somebody's else words; rec'on Bill Shakespeare's," retorted Tom.

"Why, don't you think there is anything original about me, Tom?"

"Yes. I rec'on yer the most originalist cuss on the trail. Tell yer what, Joe, I'm kinder scared about leavin' them horses back at the camp. Rec'on we won't find 'em there to-morrow—that is, if we have life enough left to look for 'em."

"Give your nag the spurs, Mike, and don't lean forward like an English jockey, or steeple-chase rider. They can't ride in your country. You're learning fast to work into our style of doing things, but you must not get skeered at nothing, until you're hurt, or then, either. We'll let you know when you're in danger. Tell you what it is, boys; this is the way to ride! Eh-h-h-h. Ho! we make the miles fly behind. Hurrah! for Jackass Pararie! We must leave

our nags in the musquitos, this side of Brown, and scout in on the sly. The Greasers know that Old Rip, Jack Ransom, and Ben Thompson, generally when they take a stroll of a night to see what's a-going on, call at the Monte Crib, and there they think they will have a chance to stab them in the dark, after knocking over the candles by a contrived plan.

"They wouldn't dare to face them, ten to one, for they know they are quick and sure shooters as there are in Texas; and I wouldn't wonder if Phil Coe is with Old Rip. Did you see him in San Antonio, Joe?"

"No; me eyes beheld him not; and such a fine commanding figure as he presents would not be apt to miss me gaze."

"I know he is in Brown," said Tom Clark, "for I was layin' for a panther the other day, on the Neuaces, and hearing a devil of a rumpus down-stream, I slid for the spot, and saw Phil had a big bull alligator, dragging around by his laryat. He caught the cuss asleep, and just noosed him neatly. Last I see of Phil he was going down the fort Brown trail—fact, he said he war a-going there—with the alligator just hanging back like a wild boar, but Phil's nag war a-jerkin' him lively. I tell yer, boys, there are enuf of us to just knock the spots outen fifty Greasers, an' I'm hankerin', to commence the deal."

"Phil must have been layin' low when I left fort Brown, for I did not see him, or pass him on the trail," said Kit.

"I rec'on he was down to Bagdad, gazing on the moonlit sea, whispering to the mermaids for a change," was Joe's guess.

This conversation occurred, as they neared Brownsville, in a low voice. As they slackened their speed, they turned into the musquitos that fringe the town, and securing the horses to trees, Bill Mann was left in charge, while the other scouts stole, Indian file, into the suburbs of the town, which was wrapped in darkness and repose.

A few minutes of rapid walking, and they stood at the northeast corner of the Plaza.

Pete Collins' bar was a blaze of light, and much laughing and loud talking reached them from that popular resort of the Texas boys.

As they stood there in the darkness a voice of strong power and good execution, reached them in a song, the words of which were distinctly heard.

THE LONE STAR RANGER'S SONG.

The ills of life, forget them, boys, and only look to where
The lone star streams above our ranks, upon the prairie air.
It speaks of better days to come, and daring spirits high,
Who put their trust in Providence and keep their powder dry.

Chorus—Then forward, boys, nor falter;
Tis Texas bids you fight!
Look where the lone star flutters,
And heaven defend the right!

We have no doubts, we have no fears that we shall win at last,
And peace shall come o'er prairies green, and perils all be past.
But still we'll look aloft to where the lone star streams on high,
And put our trust in Providence and keep our powder dry. *(Chorus.)*

"Give us another, Phil!" reached the ears of the boys, in the voice of Col. Ford, after a hearty round of applause.

SPANISH NATIONAL ANTHEM.

(TRANSLATED.)

AIR—Greenland's Icy Mountains.

March on, march on to glory,
The bugle calls the brave;
The soldier's bride is duty,
His couch perchance the grave.
He toys no more with beauty,
But marches to the fray;
March away—march away!
Away—away—away!

Drink deep, for love is fleeting;
Drink deep, for all must die;
We only live by moments,
Then wherefore should we sigh.
We may not see to-morrow,
We only have to die.
March away; march away—
Away, away, away.
March away, march away,
Away—away—away.

As the last words of the song died away a loud hurrah, mingled with the Texas yell, rung from the bar-room, and Phil Cole stood within the brilliantly-lighted door, plainly outlined to the scouts, Col. Ford, Jim Ransom, and Ben Thompson behind him; and they gave another wild yell as Phil, with great dexterity, let off six shots from his revolver, up into the black sky.

"Phil can sing, that's a sure thing," said Kit. "Now I'll see if I can't get speech with them without exciting notice from the Greasers, who are undoubtedly spying them, and counting upon the death of those celebrated Gringoes within the hour. Take my Sharpe's rifle, Joe, and freeze to it, until I make a call on you. I brought a serape on purpose for this; rather warm for using it, but they'll think I'm troubled with ague, and 'tis a cool night considering the

heat of yesterday;" and wrapping a Mexican blanket about him, in the true Greaser style, Kit approached Pete Collins' bar by the darkest route, entered, passed directly through the crowd of Mexicans and Texans, and toward the door of the dining-room, to the right of the bar. As he passed the men he wished to see, a scarcely distinguishable snake-like hiss issued from his lips, at each Ranger's shoulder.

Every American we have mentioned, upon one pretense or another, left the bar, one by one, glided around the south corner of the Plaza and entered the dining-room by the back door.

Kit sat at the end of the dining-table, his head upon his arms, his arms upon the table, completely shielding himself from recognition.

Col. Ford, tall, raw-boned, grizzly-haired, entered, and silently the other Rangers, Ben. Thompson, Phil. Coe, and Jim Ransom, stood by his side a moment after.

Old Rip folded his arms, put his right foot forward, and with a merry twinkle in his eye, said:

"Rec'on that cuss has got into the wrong room. See here, stranger, this is the grub-room. You can spread yourself for a snooze up stairs. Pete'll show you up, after you have told us what makes the snakes uneasy. Who the devil are you?"

"I'll see," said Ben Thompson, as he sprung upon the table, walked down its length, drew his Colt's revolver and inserted the cold muzzle into the ear of the man leaning upon the table.

Kit did not move a hair. Ben raised the barrel of the revolver and knocked the sombrero from his head to the floor, just as Kit raised up with a broad grin upon his face.

Ben leaped from the table, and in an instant all were shaking Kit's hands, with prairie warmth.

"That'll do, boys. Col., how do you find yourself? Phil, you haven't forgot how to sing, I see. What's the time of night, boys?"

"Rec'on it's about a quarter to ten,—about time to take something; but no use asking you! You're the most unsociable cuss I know," said Col. Ford.

"Never you mind your drink this trip. I've got some of the boys waiting for me at the corner of the Plaza. We knocked three Greasers out cold on the Resaca to-night, found letters in the pocket of one. You, Col., and the boys with you, are to be assassinated to-night, between ten and eleven, at the monte crib. Load up your six, Phil. All of you go right to the crib. We boys will scout around, and lay low for the Texas yell; then the ball, or balls open. No time for gab. We'll show them what a few Texas boys can do to-night, or die right there. By-by, boys; this hour decides the fate of the Scouts of the Rio Grande."

Before a word could be spoken by the Rangers, fast-talking Kit had got through, having the back-door latch in his hand. As the last word passed his lips he quickly drew it open, stepped out, closed it softly and disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Col. Ford looked at the boys with a satisfied look in his eyes as he said:

"Fun ahead for us, pards. Kit's a brick—a pressed brick, hope he never'll be broke. Come on for the crib. Are you all fixed for business?"

"I'm always fixed for anything or everything, and can fight in a sombrero or a stove-pipe either," answered Ben Thompson.

"Rec'on I'm as ready as anybody, and as anxious to wade in, if I do shoot into the air once in a while to clear my six, keep the cobwebs out and give vent to my feelings. I can shoot, also, into anybody that don't like my style," was Phil's answer.

"I'm thinking I know one Greaser by the name of Gomez that is aware of this plot. He was dealing a while ago, when I was at the crib, and the overbearing look he gave kinder puzzled me. I understand it now, and I'm danged if I don't go for him on the jump, right at the start," declared Jack Ransom.

"Well, boys, come on! Kit has had time to slink away. We'll just blow with Pete a minute, then try our hands at this fresh deal. Don't waste no powder, and look out for cold steel."

CHAPTER VIII.

BIG FOOT WALLACE'S RECEPTION.

Iron-jointed, supple-sinewed, they can ride or they can run,
Catch the wild horse with their lariats, hurl their lances in the sun.

* * * * * Untouched by human laws they stood,
But God had heard the cry of blood!

THE gobble of the wild turkeys announced to Clown that daylight was near at hand, although it was still quite dark in the river bottom.

He stepped gently up to where Jack was sleeping, to awaken him, as he did not wish to disturb Rely until the last minute, when the morning meal of broiled beef, corn-pone, and coffee should be prepared, for Clown knew Rely would need all the rest she could get, to be able to undergo the fatigue of the long and rapid marches they must make before reaching the Rio Grande.

Clown laid his hand softly upon Jack's mouth,

which was wide open, and gave a hiss into his ear.

An eighty-four-pound gun, had it been fired as near as Clown's head was to Jack's, would not have produced any more agile or lofty circus tumbling, or more piercing yells.

Clown was thrown backward down the gully. When he recovered himself, and sat up on the opposite side of the water-wash, Jack was sitting directly across from him, his hands clasped around his knees, the same position as on a former occasion in the coach.

"You are a dang'd nice man to talk about folks bein' so noisy in thur' sleep as to bring down a war-party on us, now, ain't ye? If they didn't hear you yell clean over at Pleasanton, they must be deaf. I rec'oned you'd cut up some kind of a caper, so I threw a blanket doubled over Rely's head, but I heard her groan, when you started your music. Now, see here, Jack, I've been howled at by Lipaus, Kioways, Camanches, and a heap of other tribes, but I'll bet high you can knock the spots outen any of 'em, when you go in for a regular old he yell."

"See here, Clown, you just gaze at me fur a few brief, fleeting periods. I'm a-goin' to spit out gab that I mean, and jist you reccomember my remarks, and stow 'em away in yer brain-box. Rec'on the cover is kinder loose, anyhow. You know I'm a little flighty just now. Loss of sleep, bein' left behind by the Rangers, an' rum, has kinder upset me. I hain't got all the whis'k outen me yet. Don't yer never, until I get straightened out, clap yer hand over my grub-trap ag'in, or hiss in my ear. Yer know I hate snakes.

"See here, anything left in that bottle? I believe I'll take my last nip, this side the Rio Grande. I've seen more Inguns ter night than w'n'd stretch to the Rockies. I don't care a dang fur 'em; I ain't afeard of 'em, but I don't want 'em to bother me when I'm tryin' to repose myself, and not feelin' just hunky.

"Give us a drink, an' I'll call us square. I'll wake up easy to-morrow mornin', I rec'on, if I wake up at all."

Clown went to a hollow tree, reached down into the cavity, produced the bottle, and handed it to Jack, saying:

"Remember, old pard, that's yer last. Rec'on we'll need it fur some other purpose, or I'd smash her, snakes or no snakes. You don't get another pull, unless as a medicine, and yer can't play off sick on me. Put yer head ter soak in the river; put down a good squar' meal of bacon and coffee, and you'll be O. K."

Jack took a moderate drink, went to the river for a wash, and returned, looking like a new man.

"Now, Clown, don't show me that bottle, ag'in. I'm flunk, and can go through, I rec'on, without runnin' wild. That bacon and coffee smells good. If I wearnt better 'twould sicken me."

While Jack was speaking, Rely came from her bower and bid them good-morning. Jack showed their charge a good place to perform her morning ablutions, and she returned fresh as a rosebud flecked with morning dew.

The breakfast was soon dispatched, and in ten minutes they were all mounted, forded the river, and spurred on through the post-oaks.

"We will keep clear of the fort Ewell trail until we pass the settlements," Jack ordered.

So they traveled, with the exception of a three hours' rest during the heat of the day, until nearly night, and then camped on the San Miguel river, having made full sixty miles!

Rely was fatigued, and not sorry to rest beneath the shadows of the river-bottom timber.

The boys were very careful now, as they were near the course of Camanche war-parties when raiding down country.

Jack forded the river, climbed a tall tree to take a look at the prairies beyond, but nothing suspicious met his view; there were no living humans in sight, but possibly there might be, traveling in the belt of timber which fringed the river. He returned to camp, and the horses were picketed within half a pistol-shot from the party. As the breeze, what there was, came up the river, they built a small fire, knowing the smoke would not show, and the smell of burning wood would be carried down-stream, the point they least expected danger.

They eat their supper in silence, for they were much worn by the long ride, not having been in the saddle before for some time, and were also aware that it was necessary for them to keep as still as possible in the section of the country in which they were.

The river ran not ten yards from the fire. The sun had gone down below the prairie horizon, but it was light enough to glance clearly through the sights of a rifle.

They had just finished their meal, and were in the act of loosening the blankets from the saddles, when a loud splash came from the opposite side of the river, followed by another, and another, until, as Jack listened intently, he knew at least a score of horses were in the stream.

He knew they were horses by the tread upon the bank, before they entered the river. Now, by the way they struck the water, and the heaviness of the tread, he also knew the animals were ridden by men.

The absence of all playfulness and neighing—their entering one after another in place of a general rush, as was common with mustangs—proved them to be singly under control.

Who and what these men were must be ascertained, and that quickly.

Clown and Rely were looking at Jack, who motioned toward the saddles and then the horses.

They understood and commenced to saddle the animals.

Jack crawled upon his hands and knees as near the river as he dared, and parted the branches.

Twenty yards from him, seated upon wild looking and gayly decorated mustangs, that were drinking eagerly of the cool waters, was a score of Camanche warriors, who were also drinking, by leaning from the animals and scooping up the water in both hands.

Their hideous features were daubed with war-paint, and black and vermillion streaks ran along each side of the backbones of the horses to the tails. Jack knew they had traveled a long distance from the way the horses drank and the manner of the Indians, but he waited for no further investigations but stole away silently to the comrades of his danger, his heart in his throat with the great fear he had for Rely's safety.

Clown and Rely had already saddled their horses; the animals were allowed to feed for fear their attention might be attracted by those in the river. One neigh might cost them their lives.

Jack quickly threw the saddle over the back of his horse, drawing the girth an extra hole tighter, bridled the animal, and gave a look at Clown that told more than his tongue could, had it been safe to use it.

Jack motioned them to mount and pointed down the river; then turning his horse to bring it between him and the stream, he leveled his Sharpe's rifle over the saddle, as Clown, with Rely, slowly walked their horses down the San Miguel. A horse's head pressed through the branches at the very spot Jack had reconnoitered. Jack's cheek kissed the breech of his rifle, his eye ran along the sights as a grim warrior's head cleft the foliage. The eyes of each were upon the other; the Indian's lips parted for the danger signal; it was too late; Jack's rifle belched forth its contents of fire and lead.

The death howl and warning whoop, blended horribly together as the savage fell from his horse, dead, upon the smoldering camp-fire of his enemies.

The instant after Jack pulled trigger he was in the saddle, and drove the long rowels of his spurs deep in the flanks of his mustang. The horse bounded into the air, then, in a wild gallop, sprung down the river, while the river bottom resounded with yells of rage from the Indians, as they came crashing through the branches and saw their dead chief.

When the forms of the retreating Texans met their view, the war-cry burst in terrific, vengeful meaning from their throats, and as they dashed in pursuit they sent a shower of arrows after the almost flying whites.

"Take the lead, Clown, for Big Foot Wallace's ranch! It ain't over five miles from here. Follow the river. Rely, keep close to Clown, and mind your nag; a fall is death, or worse to you. The biz of both on yer is to get there as quick as yer can. I'll keep the Reds frum bein' anxious or too eager, and we'll fetch 'em right into a trap, fur Big Foot is at home; seen his best saddle hog to-night hobbled out above here. Git up, an' git!"

On they went, the Indians with fierce yells, lashing their mustangs with the cruel raw-hide quirks, causing them to leap into the air with the force of the blows, and then launch out with redoubled speed.

"Keep just clear of the timber for three miles, if you have the luck to get so far, Clown. I want to show 'em some shootin', the 'old reliable' style."

Three warriors, better mounted than the others, were now within a hundred yards, and, as Jack had slacked up to give his friends a chance to put more ground between them and their enemies, the red-skins were gaining, and would soon be within sixty yards, when their bows would be as effective as rifles, and more to be dreaded, especially if the arrows were poisoned.

One of the three pushed ahead of the others. He was a splendid specimen of his race; horse and rider acted as one—each movement of one was in concert with the other.

This brave was fitting an arrow to his bow; two others hung dangling from between the fingers of the right, or bow-string hand, to be sent with the rapidity of lightning, one after another, but an instant apart.

Jack wheeled, and gave a twitch on his bridle-rein; the powerful Spanish bit brought his horse to a dead stop, trembling in every limb, but Jack sat him like a man of iron; his Sharpe's was brought to his shoulder just as the bow of the Indian was drawn so that the arrow-head touched the left forefinger. The report of the rifle and the twang of the bow-string mingled,

The death-howl of the Red struck Jack's ear

as he dashed his spurs home, and his sombrero skurried through the air over his horse's head, with the arrow imbedded in the thick felt.

The other two Indians were not fifty feet away, their bows were slung upon their arms, and the long deadly lances were poised as they came thundering on.

Jack, who thought his time had surely come, determining to send one more red tiger to his long home, dropped his rifle-strap over the horn of his saddle, and jerked out his Colt's revolver from the scabbard; then, throwing himself half around, he let fly at the nearest brave—the only one he had any chance at before the lances would cleave the air and impale him.

The sharp crack of Clown's rifle, blended in with the report of Jack's revolver, as the two lances cleaved the air, one burying itself full two feet in Jack's mustang—the other whizzing past Jack, the thick end giving him a stinging blow upon the head, which nearly took the senses from him.

As Jack's horse sunk to the ground, Clown's voice rung in his ear:

"Jump! Jack, for your life! Here's a horse!" and he felt a rawhide rope in his hand. Clown grabbed him by the belt, and hoisted him into an Indian saddle.

There was a rush from behind, as yelling demons came thundering down upon them.

A blur seemed to hover before the eyes of Jack; he felt a heavy blow given to his horse behind, and the animal spring madly forward; then a perfect fusilade from the revolvers of Clown, struck his ears.

The air was filled with smoke and the hazy twilight of evening together; these made things favorable for our friends.

Wild yells of agony, and whoops of vengeance followed the revolver fusilade of Clown, who had fired, with quick-playing fingers, twelve shots, right into the mass of savages as they came upon the scene of Jack's accident.

On, on went the horse, which took Jack he knew not where.

Rapid clatter of hoofs was behind him, and soon Clown took the rawhide ropes from his hands, and his voice broke out in words of cheer:

"Stick to the nag, old pard! I'll see yer through or die. Five minutes and we're safe. Rely is ahead, and at Big Foot's afore this time."

On, on—the baffled savages maddened to fury at the death of their comrades, and now seemingly sure of their revenge.

On, on, down through the live-oaks, Clown having Jack's horse in the lead, and avoiding the low-hanging branches of the trees.

A few more leaps, and the cabin of Big Foot would be reached.

The Reds, like a pack of wolves, followed, howling, two hundred yards behind. The death-scene of their chief had lost them ground.

The horses were covered with foam, and a wavering, staggering gait told that they must soon slacken the headlong speed that had been kept up.

"Cheer up, Jack!" yelled Clown; "there's the opening, and there is Big Foot and Rely at the cabin. Hurrah! for the giant scout of the Rio Grande! Hurrah for us, too, by Christy! Big Foot's ready for biz, and 'Old Reliable' is going to talk! Shoot away, over or under, right or left, anyway, so you wipe out a Red!"

A ball whizzed past Clown's head; the report followed, and with a yell of agony from the rear.

The horses dashed up to the cabin. Big Foot Wallace lifted Jack clear off the Indian horse, pried the animal with his bowie, and the horse, followed by Clown's, staggered to the river, beyond the cabin.

Rely and Jack were pushed inside the cabin door, opened just wide enough to squeeze in; Clown followed. Big Foot gave a parting shot, and crowding his bulky form inside the closed door, as a perfect hail of arrows struck the cabin.

A sharp, shrill shriek, like that of a woman in horrible agony and deathly fear, came from the other end of the cabin, as the heavy bars fell into place, fastening the door.

A low, soothing whistle came from the lips of Big Foot, and then, looking at Clown in the dim light, he said:

"Take a sight outen that west end-loop, an' see whar them cusses are prospectin', an' whether yer think they'll quit the game. I've got a boss card to play yet. How many on'em has chawed dirt on yer back trail?"

"I rec'on seven went under fur good, and sum bad hurt, away back, an' you spotted two here. There's two dozen or so spilin' for a fight yet. Dang the cusses; they don't know when they're wusted. They've got an old wagon-tongue o' yours, an' I rec'on they kalkerate to break up house-keepin' fur yer or have a house-warmin', one or t'other. They've left the nags up on the rise. Here they come! Doggoned if I don't spite sum on 'em for a war-dance!"

"Hold!" said Big Foot; "don't yer waste a grain o' powder on the varmints. You lay low till I give yer a hint to sling yer kard; they can't knock in that door no way, an' I'm comin' if I think they seen what door we cum in by."

Rely was bathing Jack's head, who lay upon

a pile of skins in one corner of the apartment. The scalp was torn, and he had lost a large amount of blood.

As Big Foot made the last remark to Clown, he addressed them all, saying:

"You all keep cool; locate right whar yer are; don't be took back by nothin' yer hear, till I let on ter yer. It's about as dark outside as in here. I'm agoin' to t'other room. Got a partition in my cabin. You'll hear fun soon."

As he spoke, a heavy substance struck the door, but it was not the one by which they gained entrance. This was ingeniously covered with split logs, spiked on; so, when closed, no break in the logs was visible, except at close inspection.

The door, upon which the Indians were now working to gain an entrance, was about four feet east of this. The distance the Reds were from the cabin, together with the semi-darkness, had kept their usually keen eyes from observing that there were two doors.

As Big Foot spoke of the fun yet to come, he mounted a ladder to the loft above and was lost to view.

Then again commenced the same low, soothing whistle, accompanied by the rattling of chains, and a loud, cat-like purring.

Again the wagon-tongue struck the door with a crash, sending the splinters flying against the partition. The next lunge of the battering-ram must force the door.

The cabin was as still as death, with the exception of the low, hardly audible whistle of Big Foot, and the strange, purring sound.

The patter, patter, of many moccasined feet upon the ground outside reached the ears of the whites; then the crash, the quick cracking of wood, and the fall of the door upon the earth floor inside, followed by the exultant war-whoops of the Indians, as they sprung into the opening, in one huddled mass, their war-clubs and scalping-knives brandished above their heads.

The rattle of heavy chains, as if, this time, cast aside, a loud, piercing whistle, and then, a horrid, blood-curdling scream, that riveted every warrior to his tracks with terror!

The spring of a heavy body, the scratching of the claws as they left the wood-work, and loosened the grip which gave force to the lunge, was distinctly heard; then, as it struck among the mass of Indians, the yells of horror, the shrieks of agony, were mingled with the tearing of flesh, the spurting of blood, cracking of bones, and horrible crunching of teeth.

Rely, pale as death, stood in the center of the main portion of the cabin; Clown was recapping his arms, and Jack, with a bandage around his head, stood leaning on his rifle, by the side of Rely, when Big Foot dropped from the loft and sprung for the door. Throwing the bars one side, and kicking it open, he snatched his rifle and shouted:

"Come on with yer shooters! All hands, but don't yer shoot my cat!"

All rushed out, arms at a ready, Rely included.

The moon now lit up the scene, and showed by the other door, which was smashed in, half a dozen Indians writhing in agony upon the ground. Others were flying in terror toward the horses.

"Don't let a single cuss go back ter his squaw! show yer shootin' edication, now, or never!" shouted Big Foot, as he brought down the Red nearest to the horses. Clown, Jack, and Rely opened fire until not one was left alive of those who were striving to get to their animals. The single Indian left in charge of them was seen to gallop away, gazing back in terror to the fast falling warriors of his tribe, and lashing his mustang with his quirt most unmercifully, as the frequent death-howls struck his ears.

They turned to those who had been rolling in agony by the door; they were now rigid in death and bathed in gore, while the panther, an animal of prodigious size, lay stretched out among the dead Indians, licking the blood from the many knife-wounds received in defense of its master's home.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MONTE CRIB FIGHT.—DISPATCHES TO COL. FORD.

Then list! Not far there lurks a crew
Of trusty comrades, staunch and true—
Rangers, whose fiery souls like mine
Spurn at the bonds of discipline.
Our schemes are laid, our purpose set;
A chief, a leader lack we yet,
Each to an equal loath to bow
Will yield to chief renown'd as thou.

* * * * *

"Twas then mid tumultuous smoke and strife,
Where each man fought for death or life.

COL. JOHN FORD, Jack Ransom, Phil Cole and Ben Thompson entered the monte crib. Three tables were in full blast, giving lay-outs, but with few betterers for that time of night. In the middle of each table was placed the bank, consisting of Mexican dollars, halves and quarters, with a few doubleons—from three to five hundred dollars in each bank. The dealer sat on one, and the player on the other side of the table.

There were but six or eight Mexicans betting at each bank, and not much interested in the game, or they would not have looked up so anxiously when the Texans entered. It was very evident to the latter that those in the house were most of them aware of the plot of assassination. Each of the Texans had two of Colt's navy revolvers in his belt, besides the long-bladed bowie; the former were at half-cock, and drawn around at each side, to be handy for use, and easily drawn when needed. Pressed up against the walls outside, peeping through the cracks, were the scouts headed by Kit Carson and Joe Booth—the bushes and darkness securely hiding them from the observation of those entering the building. The Texas boys, headed by Col. Ford, agreeably to a prearranged plan, went to the table nearest to one end of the crib, taking their places in a position which brought every person in plain view at any time they chose to look up from the game. They also had the end wall of the building at their backs, with no possibility of any one getting behind them. This position was gained in a careless, sauntering way, that betrayed no sign that any one would suppose that they had any preference for that particular table or position; still, it was very evident that the Mexicans did not like to see them take their places there.

"Bar the door on the seven ag'in the ace!" said Jack Ransom, as he laid five silver dollars on top of the seven, at the same time eying the dealer, who was the same Gomez before mentioned as having put on a good many extra airs over Jack when he had been in before.

As Jack bent over and laid his bet on the seven, he noticed the silver hilt of a dagger just visible above the collar of Gomez's jacket, partially concealed by his long hair.

"Seven in the door! Pick up your money, Jack! Give us a lay-out of the ace and deuce; ten dollars on the ace! Lost! but you won double my bet, colonel," said Ben Thompson, ("Fighting Ben.")

The Texans all appeared to be earnestly occupied in watching the game, but their keen eyes knew of every movement made around them, and noticed the casual entering of Mexican after Mexican, and the significant looks they gave one at another, as they took notice of the noted scouts at the lower table. Now and then the tip-it-tip of a horse galloping into town sounded faintly as some Mexican from Cortina's camp rode as near to the monte crib as he dared; and left his horse to enter the crib as though he was a common frequenter and resident of Brownsville, but they were far from deceiving the sharp eyes of the scouts. There were now some fifty Mexicans, apparently as eager staking two-bits at a bet as though their lives depended upon the winning. The Mexican signal for the murder of the Texans, was, that every candle should be extinguished, except the one nearest the scouts, and that should be left unsnuffed, so as to give a dim, uncertain light. They could then spring upon their game and butcher them before they could offer any resistance, or recover from their surprise.

The Texans determined that the surprise should be on the other side, and it had been agreed that Jack Ransom should be the man to start the ball by settling his account with Gomez, should the overbearing, insulting manner of the latter go far enough to excuse it, and if not, he should be provoked into a quarrel. The opportunity came, even before the Texans anticipated, for Jack caught Gomez pulling two cards, causing "Fighting Ben" to lose a large sum of money. Jack was nearest the dealer, and when he noticed the cheat, he quickly snatched the cards, separated them by a slip of the forefinger and thumb, exposing Gomez before the betters around the table. The hand of Gomez quickly glided up over his shoulder for the knife which was down his neck, but he was too late, for Jack's hand was there before his, and, quick as thought, the long, slender-bladed stiletto was drawn, and his own knife was buried to the hilt in the breast of Gomez. Other knives flashed in the candle-light. The Texans all sprung back to the walls of the Monte House. "Fighting Ben," the last to leave the table, covering the retreat of Jack Ransom, received a stab in the arm and thigh, but a life paid for each, and in an instant he was beside his comrades against the wall, a revolver in either hand. A score of Greasers sprung on the jump, right at the Texans, thinking to overwhelm them by numbers, but the eight six-shooters of the Rangers cut them down, and the Texan yell rung out, as signal to Kit Carson and Reckless Joe, who, with their party, charged in at the east door, just as a large number of Mexicans entered opposite from the side next the Matamoras ferry. As Kit and Joe entered, a perfect hail of balls were sent into the bandit ranks, from both parties of whites.

Mexicans in squads of a dozen sprung madly at the Texans with their long knives, but, before they could reach them, the deadly Colts made wounds that none could stand under. A few of the bandits had pistols, but most of them had left them behind to throw off any suspicion as to their purpose, and not expecting to have any use for them, as they thought the scouts would fall an easy prey, to their knives.

Those who had pistols, did not do much toward using them to advantage, for the row had commenced so unexpectedly, and the terrible fire of the Texans was so destructive, that before they knew what to do, half their number lay dead or dying upon the dirt floor.

The survivors made a rush for the door toward the Matamoras ferry, the balls hurtling through their crowded masses as they pressed out. A few scattering shots were delivered at the Texans. Groans of agony, *malditos*, pistol-shots, and the triumphant yells of the Texans filled the night air.

"Come on, boys!" cried Col. Ford, as Kit, Joe, and the other scouts made their way over the dead to his party. "Remember! the Alamo and Mier."

"Fighting Ben" and Phil Cole, badly wounded, sat upon the floor, where they had held their position through the fight, and urged on the others, after the fast-retreating bandits. A sickly, pale moon, partially lit up the night outside.

The band of scouts dashed after the flying Greasers, who had no time to mount their horses in the bush, but made their way directly for the old rope ferry.

Down the steep bank they sprung, their ranks thinned by the revolvers of the Texans.

They plunged into the river and lunged out to swim for the opposite shore.

"Now's the time to use our Sharpe's rifles, boys," said Kit, as from the high bank above the ferry he blazed away into the waters, which, reflecting the moon's rays, showed plainly the struggling forms of the invaders of Texas.

The detonations of the rifles aroused the Mexican guard at the ferry-landing, on the other shore, and lights were seen flickering, here and there, along the bank as those who were so fortunate as to escape the rifle-shots, called loudly for help to their countrymen.

"I kinder rec'on we've wiped out the most of the cusses. That was a sort o' surprise-party, warn't it? Some on 'em took a bath, an' didn't stop fur soap," observed Tom Clark.

"Tis strange, 'tis passing strange that our sister Republic should allow her citizens armed, with malice and hatred in their hearts, to invade the realms of Uncle Sam. Hear me, ye gods and little fishes! Be it known that, henceforth and forever, as heretofore, we denounce, we disown you, Mexico! No more shall the right hand of relationship be extended to the degenerate sons of Montezuma. You never got a shake from a Texan, anyhow; but at Washington they call you pet names. I mean your ministers; they sell you arms to use against their own citizens, and give you long credits. You owe Uncle Sam untold gold; you owe Texas blood more precious than all the gold in this most uncharitable, deceptive world," declaimed Reckless Joe.

Mike O'Keefe stood panting by the scouts, having done good service at the crib and in the chase. Hearing the remarks of Joe he accosted him:

"Sure, an' is that Maxico, Mr. Rickless, wher' the Grazers ar' afther coming frum? 'Pon me soul, it's a h'athen lookin' place be the moonlight. An' yees are afther saying there be fishes over there. Sure I'd like a taste o' fish, cum a Friday; but divil do I know whin that'll be; me head is afther bein' so bothered wid the way yees scouts around, as yees call it. The back o' me hand to Maxico an' thim that's in it. It's a decent male and slape I lost be thim, let alone the worrymint o' mind."

"You'll be all hunk now, Mike. You can git some good cloth's often them what's knocked under, and a fit-out for yer horse," Tom Clark suggested.

"Sure, I'm danged, ef I wouldn't go naked intirely afore I'd be afther warein' the cloth's ev a dead mon. Thero's back luck in it, they alwaysould me at 'ome."

"Come on, boys! We have bu'st them up, and cleaned out the shebang; there'll be a few less to fight up the river. We will now go and see to Phil and Ben Thompson. Kit and Joe, you are youngest; streaker for the crib and attend to them. We will go over to Pete's; have a room prepared, and yank Dr. Barry out to dress their wounds," said Col. Ford.

"Nothing can make me hoofs more light, make me throw off on me stomach longer, or cause me heart to beat with keener sorrow, than the kno'ledge that a comrade lays suffering. Come on, Kit! We're needed at the charnel-house, once the monte crib."

Kit and Joe hastened on ahead to attend to the wounded, but a ministering angel was there before them, who had tenderly dressed their wounds and made them comfortable amid that horrible scene of death and blood. As soon as the scouts entered the door they recognized the nurse. What Scout or Ranger of the Rio Grande who did not know her? and up rung the shout from their lips: "Hurrah for Kate Luby! the only rose without a thorn upon the Rio Grande!" There was about her presence something so noble, so far above the common human, that all, high or low, bowed humbly before her, and the man who would in any way have shown her disrespect, would have been a corpse the next minute.

Her heroism, her devotion to all suffering humanity, or all who needed advice or sympathy; her great talents—she speaking fluently five languages—all made her appear to the sons of the Lone Star State too high and exalted to be idly gazed upon. But what made her more respected than all was her great bravery and recklessness, she having at one time, when Cortina had a citizen of Brownsville prisoner, and about to have him shot, entered his camp and demanded the prisoner's liberty. Such was her command over herself, her queuel bearing, that even the bandit chief could not but show respect to her, and, strange to say, released the prisoner; and Kato Luby returned with him to his family, his heart bursting with gratitude. Many acts of equal daring endeared this lady to all residents of the lower Rio Grande, where she resided during the most bloody and lawless times for ten years, and now lives in Corpus Christi.

When Col. Ford entered and discovered Kate Luby, his rough features lit up with smiles, as he doffed his sombrero and extended his hand.

"God bless you, Kate! You are always around when any one is needing your care and attention; but in such a place as this I hate to see you. It is contaminating to breathe the air that hovers over such base things in the form of men, even when life has left them. A thousand thanks for your care of my boys, who I know will never forget it. May I escort you from this ghastly sight to your home?"

"Certainly, Col. Ford; but first order the wounded scouts brought to my house, where I can attend to them. They have lost a large amount of blood and need proper food to strengthen them. Don't say a word now; mine is law here. As far as these two boys are concerned, you have nothing more to do with them until I deliver them over to you able to take the saddle again. You have so much on your hands, colonel, that I'd better go home by myself. Joe and Kit, when they have help and horses, can bring the wounded to my house."

"Kate, I cannot allow you to go through the streets unattended; so we will go now, and I will return and have the boys moved as soon as I can. I was a-going to take them over to Pete Collins, but know they will receive better care with you."

Col. Ford escorted Kate Luby home. Joe and Kit, with the assistance of Mike and Tom Clark, gently lifted the wounded scouts upon two horses brought from the prairie camp outside the town, and they were slowly taken to the residence of Kate Luby, and left to her tender care and sympathy.

Col. Ford hastened after Doctor Barry, and after his return from his patients was glad to learn that no bones were broken. Phil Coll was shot through the thick portion of the thigh, besides being stabbed twice, but not seriously, at the time the row commenced when Jack knifed Gomez.

The scouts all met at Pete's, and the colonel soon joined them after his consultation with Doctor Barry.

Pete, although quite deaf, had been awakened by the firing and was ready to receive the boys, his good-natured features beaming with smiles, for he knew the Mexicans had been severely punished. His wife was a Mexican woman, but no man on the river held more bitter hatred toward the bandits of Cortina than Pete.

"I rec'on you'll have to start a new graveyard, Pete, to-morrow; there's a right smart lot of Greasers tew plant, an' I hope they'll never sprout ag'in," said Tom, as he entered the bar.

"No need to bury the cowardly cut-throats; pitch them into the river for the cat-fish, although I don't rec'on even *they* would stomach them. What you boys a-going to take? rec'on you're all dry except Kit; he never patronizes me. Here, Col. Ford, my treat; it shall be champaigne, and Charles Heidsick at that."

While the Texans joined Pete in a glass of wine, the heavy tramp of infantry, at a double-quick, struck their ears, and a squad of boys in blue halted before the entrance to the bar-room, on the Plaza.

"Left face, right dress, front, order arms!" sounded, clear and shrill, on the night air, and the officer of the guard, with drawn sword, entered the bar.

"Hal-loo, captain!" cried Col. Ford, "just in time for the wine if you wasent for the fight." I should have informed you, so you could have taken a hand, but I only received the news about an hour before they had planned to send us on the long, dark trail before our time. You have hustled yourselves to get here so soon, for it ain't more'n half an hour since we waded in on the cusses, and you're camped below the walls of the old fort."

Captain Haynes grasped the hand of Col. Ford, and, nodding to each of the scouts in turn, accepted the glass of wine the colonel passed him.

"Fill up again, all hands!" said Pete; "don't allow Cap. to drink alone."

"Here is confusion, defeat and death to the guerrillas of the Rio Grande!" cried Col. Ford, and with a wild Hu-rah, the glasses clinked, clinked around the circle.

"Now, colonel," said Captain Haynes, "give me the details of this disturbance."

Col. Ford related the circumstances connected with the murder of the ranchero and his son; the finding of the letters in the jacket by Kit Carson, Jr., who produced the same for the inspection of Capt. Haynes. In these letters the plot of the bandits was clearly proven.

The counterplot of the Texans and its grand success were also explained to the captain, and he agreed to break up his camp below the fort, march into the town, and take up his quarters, so as to be able to guard the citizens from any other marauding band from the bandit camp above, who would, doubtless, now take the first chance to avenge their comrades, slain by the Texans.

"You know, Col. Ford," said Capt. Haynes, "the government only gives us what you might call a corporal's guard to each of the frontier posts, and we are almost powerless beyond our own camp. One thousand cavalry ought to be stationed, continually, between here and Eagle-Pass, and stationed so as to be easily brought together when any point is threatened by invasion by these cut-throat thieves. We might then, with some chance of success, try to keep them on their own side of the river."

"Come into the dining-room, all my scouts, and you also, Captain Haynes; one thing has slipped my mind."

Captain Haynes and the scouts followed Col. Ford into the dining-room; the doors were closed, and scouts stood at each with drawn revolvers.

"Take a seat, Capt. Haynes. I rec'on I ought to have some news from up country that will interest us who have been cooped up here at this town on the lookout for sign. How is it, Kit, or Joe; have you anything from Governor Houston, and what's the news?"

Joe Booth stepped up to Col. Ford and delivered a large packet, stamped with the seal of State, saying:

"Me lord, had not the times been pregnant with events, among which your highness' life did hang as 'twere upon a hair, the dispatches from our honored governor would have met your gaze previous to this occasion. I beg your gracious pardon for the seeming delay, but dark deeds of blood lay thick around to show as me excuses."

"Bite it right off there, Joe; I'll be danged if I can read; you throw me off the trail every time, when you sling that sort of gab at me," averred Col. Ford.

He perused the papers from Governor Houston with great interest for a few moments, then sprung from his chair, and whirled his sombrero across the room.

"Hu-rah! for the Rangers and Scouts of the Rio Grande! Captain Haynes, come here a moment. Boys, excuse me; the very walls have ears, as Joe says." A whispered consultation between the two officers for a moment, and they clasped hands, highly pleased at the news contained in the dispatches.

"Boys, I want'd Cap. to know how things were working. You that come from Banketta can inform my boys who were here in Brown. Joe, and Kit, you better go down and see the boys at Kate Luby's; this will cheer them up to know everything is hunk for a smash into Cortina's camp up the river. Mum's the word, and no outside talk. Captain Haynes and Pete Collins are the only persons here that'll know where we are gone, except Kate Luby. I'll be danged, boys, if the work we must do the next ten days shall not shine on the pages of Texas history. A surprise is what we're playin' for, and if we get it, with the force promised, there won't be quite so many sudden deaths among the ranches, or so many horses, mules, and cattle, extending their range into Mexico, from this State. Come out, all hands, and take a smoke, a rest for a few hours, and then, hu-rah! for the chaparrals and vengeance! Captain Haynes, I hope we shall all meet you again, but it is doubtful; when we lay down upon the prairie, we never know whether we shall ever spread another blanket."

"I trust we shall meet again, colonel; and you also, boys. I expect to hear good news of you shortly. No, thanks; I'll not smoke to-night. Bueno noche, senors."

"Good-night!" echoed the colonel and scouts, as they lit their cigars.

"Attention, squad! Right face, counter-march by file right, march!" and the boys in blue returned toward the old fort.

"Now, gentlemen, it's midnight; all of you git for the horses of the dead Greasers and bring them here. Leave all the harness, not needed, with Pete; he will take good care of it for us; secure the nags outside to the musquitos, where your own horses are, and we'll take them out to the Resaca. You can take a snooze until three o'clock. Joe and Kit, call, with my compliments, on Kate Luby, and tell the boys what's up; perhaps I may not have time to see them. All be in the saddle at three, and no noise. I'll be with you on time."

The scouts departed to carry out the orders of Colonel Ford, while the latter smoked, up and down the bar, thinking over the plans for the coming campaign. Suddenly his eyes rested upon the form of a human being, rolled in a blanket, in one corner of the room, and he im-

mediately stirred the same with his boot, saying:

"Who the devil have we here? A spy?" In an instant the form of the sleeper sprang upright, disclosing the wild, half-awakened Irishman, Mike, who braced himself a la Morrissey, shoving his fist into the face of Colonel Ford, who had a broad grin upon his features—recognizing Mike as one he had seen doing good service, using a rifle in shillalah style in the fight.

"Be the powers, an' its yoos, is it? But I'm danged ef I care, at all, at all; ef it was prisedent, ye was, ev this big America, yees can't be aither pokin' yees fut at Mike O'Keefe. I never stud that same frum ony mon but me fathur, God rest him, an' it's late fur me to begin that same. You'll take a round wid me, or yees are no mon at all. Yees might kick yer fut at a Grazer, but yees can't do id wid an Irisher wid out the loss o' blood. Dafind yerself or yees mither'll not kno' yees in a jiffy."

The smile upon Colonel Ford's face deepened, as, with a quick movement, entirely unlooked for by Mike, he grasped each wrist of that individual in his iron grip, and drew him toward the bar, over which Pete leaned, an amused spectator of his countryman's tight fix.

Mike writhed this way and that, to no purpose; he was in the grasp of a man whose muscles were of steel, and whose lungs had been fed with the pure air of heaven, but his heart was as tender as a woman's, and his voice showed it, as he spoke to Pete, saying:

"Here is a man who is rather excited. If he wants any thing to eat or drink and a comfortable bed to sleep in, give him the best you have, at my expense. I rec'on he was worn, and sleepy. I'm sorry I woke him; thought he was a spy," then loosening his grasp around Mike's wrists, he extended his hand in token of friendship, which Mike grasped with warmth.

"Pon me soul, Ould Rip—as the b'y's calls yees, no offense intinded—but I belave ye are a gintlemon, sure an' true. I'm an Irishmon, as yees might perhaps know if ye had a talk wid Mr. Kit—God bless him an' kape him frum sorror! Its starvin' I was, on a bit ev a jackass, in a wild perrarie, whin the b'y's picked me up, an' trated me kindly. It's little sleep I've had, an' bothered wid snakes an' Grazers, bad luck to 'em, an' I'm thinkin' yer seouts don't ate often enuf, or I'm bein' hungry too often, I'm not sure which, but starvin', slappleess, an' in a strange land, I'll not allow ony one to insult me; but I know that yees did not intind to injure me famins, so it's wid pl'asure I'll take a bit to ate, and sumthing to put new strength into me, fur it's in yer sarvice I'm enlisted, I suppose."

"You shall have everything you want, Mike. When you know me better you will know it was no intention of mine to insult you. I like you all the better for resenting what you thought was intended as such. Get Mike up as good a supper as you can, I'ete; then give him a place to sleep until three o'clock. You are going with us, Mike, to—" and the colonel whispered a few words in the Irishman's ear.

"Sure I'd go to the end of the 'arth fur Mr. Kit, an' I'm thinkin' yees must be sum relation ev his; a cousin may be."

"No, Mike, I'm no relation of Kit's, but I know his people well, and his uncle is known all over the world as the king scout of America: But eat your lunch, Mike, and go to sleep; I must look up things. No sleep for me to-night," and, shaking hands with his new friend, and bidding him good-night, Col. Ford started across the Plaza to the camp of the scouts.

"Sure this is the dangiest counthry I ever heard tell on; fur they never ate or slape at all. Thunder an' ownes, it's mosef that'll never get used to that same. I'll ate and slape when I can as long as I live, and maybees that's not long. God help me."

At three o'clock the morning following the fight at the Monte Crib, the scouts silently made their way through the musquitos to the Resaca de la Palma.

Col. Ford and Jim Ransom were now added to the party.

Fighting Ben and Phil Cole were left behind at Kate Luby's where they would receive the best of care, and in a few days Kate, after consulting the doctor, promised Col. Ford she would have them well enough to follow the trail of his party toward the rendezvous. Col. Ford had, in an interview with Kate, confided to her the secrets of the dispatches, knowing they would never pass her lips.

Col. Ford and Mike became fast friends before reaching the Resaca, and the latter related his various adventures since leaving Killa-mac-thomas.

"Sure it's disgusted I was wid Texas an' everything in it, espechilly the snakes; but I'm mateing such good friends an' noble gintlemin that I'm afther thinkin' if the Grazers, divil take them, don't slaughter me, loike they did the mon yonder, and the bit ev a b'y, and the oxen; curses on them, they don't even spare the poor brutes; but, as I was sayin', ev I get through alive, I don't know but what I'll stop a while in this counthry, fur Mr. Kit tells me there's betther land abuv here, a hundred miles or so."

The arrival of the scouts at their old camp now interfered with further conversation between the colonel and Mike, for the boys had brought tools from Fort Brown to bury the murdered ranchero and his boy.

The southern sun was just peeping above the level of Palo Alto prairie as the scouts lowered the bodies of the victims of the Mexican bandits into one grave, within ten feet of where the man was brutally murdered, on the border of the opening.

It was impossible to take the murdered ones' bodies to Brownsville, under the circumstances.

Father and son lay side by side, wrapped in their blankets, as many a time they had done before, sleeping together upon the prairies, but from the sleep which now held them they would never awaken.

A wife and mother was even now, perhaps, gazing out from her frontier home, anxiously looking for those now cold in death.

Alas, how many Texas homes have been thus broken.

No more would the little fellow, now cold and stiff, cry out, oh, so mournfully and strangely: "Whoa, Nig! Git up along, Spot! What yer doin' there, Whitey?"

This cry of the wounded, insane boy still, and always will, at times, ring in my ears, and I see him, as he sat upon his father's corpse. With cheeks wet with tears of sorrow, these rough sons of the prairie, with uncovered heads, hurried away from sight forever, the victims of an unprotected frontier.

A mass of dead wood was thrown over the double grave to protect it from the wolves, and the scouts, headed by Col. Ford, started up to the chaparrals toward Edinburg, keeping a long distance between them and any up-river trail.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEAD DANCE IN THE WATER.

For vengeance dark and fell was made
As well might reach hell's lowest shade—
A crime it seemed so dire and dread
That it had power to wake the dead!

* * * * *
A crime it was so dire and dread,
This mutilation of the dead!

If you had stood upon the high bank of the Rio Grande, on the American side of the river above the ferry at Brownsville, thirty-one hours after the fight between the bandits and scouts at the Monte Crib, you would have seen a most horrible sight, such as would forever have been stamped upon your memory. The unwieldy old flat-bottom scow, that served as a ferry-boat, was making its usual trips down below, conveying passengers to and from the Texas shore and Mexico.

Matamoras, with the tall turreted-towers of the cathedral looming high up above the low one-story buildings of the city, lay spread out a short distance from the river—and away beyond, to the westward, lay the unbroken plains.

You could not help noticing, as you glanced into the muddy waters above the ferry, a whirlpool of some extent. The river sweeps around a bend; at the south end of this bend is a cove, and in this cove a whirlpool. You would have noticed often, if you had been there before, gazing into the broiling waters, a log would enter the pool and go around and around, until, if you watched it, you would seem to sympathize with its troubles, and would gladly, were it not too much trouble, release it from its forced circling and hum-drum pilgrimage, and send it skimming down the river toward the sea.

But on this particular morning you observe that a most singular object is circling around and around in this whirlpool. It resembles a man. It is a man, and you think he must certainly be a lunatic to be bathing in such a dangerous place.

You see that others are attracted to this unusual sight, and you hasten up the river, and down the bank, to make sure that your eyes have not deceived you.

You notice a silent horror upon the countenances of those persons who were there before you, and instinctively turn your eyes toward the whirling waters.

The blood in your veins is suddenly chilled, and the very marrow in your bones seems turned to ice, for the most dreadful, horrible sight you have ever witnessed, is before you.

The man you see in the water is dead and mutilated. Two knife gashes upon his forehead form a cross; and you observe a larger one upon his breast, as the force of the water at times throws the body up half clear of the foamy waves. At this time you also see a log, about ten feet in length, which is bound to the waist of the dead man—the ends projecting right and left to hold the body in the position it keeps, and you reason, and correctly, that a stone is attached to the feet of the corpse, to keep it perpendicular.

The body is stripped to nakedness, and below the neck, where the clothing has formerly covered it from the sun, it is terribly white, when contrasted with the streaks of gore which have stripped and run down the cheeks and neck upon the breast.

There is a frightful laugh of derision upon the

dead features; the eyes wide open, staring fixedly; the jaw dropped, and, as the strong current at times, throws up an arm, in a life-like manner, you are forced to cover your eyes with your hands at the ghastly spectacle.

You think you could not be more moved—that the sight before you could not be surpassed for horror; but you find yourself mistaken, for round the curve rushes, seemingly dancing up and down in the waters, with glee, another corpse, that enters the whirlpool, chasing the first.

He might be a brother; they look so much alike, with the long hair and unshaven faces of the Texan ranchero. Round and round go the murdered men—the sport of the seething waters, and yet they are so nicely buoyed that they seem to hold the waters to their service, to give them pleasure.

Not only do they whirl with the waters, but at times spin like a top, while they go around the circle, and approach the center.

A fresh thrill of horror runs through the spectator as another, and another body comes sweeping around the bend and joins in the ghastly, circling race of death.

The significant looks of a few Mexicans near you, whose faces show something of exultation, force upon you, suddenly, the answer to the riddle of the circling pool:

The dead bodies of these murdered Texans have been sent down the river by Cortina's bandits, to show that they can retaliate for the killing of their comrades by the scouts at the Monte Crib, and they are buoyed so that the citizens of Brownsville will be sure to notice them.

With a sickening feeling you return up the bank, but a strange fascination causes you to turn again toward the whirlpool; and again your frame shudders as you hurry away as fast as your trembling limbs will take you, for you see that six dead men are circling around, amid the waters; a perfect mockery of death, inhuman in its origin, and more brutal than any savage act on record.

Come with me up the river, thirty miles. We must make a jump of it, for both events occurred at near the same time. A dark mass of chaparral extends in every direction—the prickly pear, or nopal predominating amid the mass of thorn-covered bush, shrub and tree. A small opening we observe in this almost impenetrable sea of thorns. It is not of more than half an acre in extent. A dozen Mexican horsemen are just leaving this opening by a narrow trail; they are armed to the teeth, and we know they are the followers of Cortina, the scourge of the Rio Grande. They disappear amid the chaparrals. We will see what brought them to this isolated spot. They must have left some sign to betray their object. Do not refuse me, and say you have seen enough of horrors, for I wish to prove to you that the Guerrillas of the chaparrals deserved no mercy, no quarter, from the Texan Rangers under Col. Ford, and also show you that we need not look to history to prove them of Indian extraction.

Upon the opposite side of the opening, from the point where the Greasers left it, we see three trees, trimmed for six feet from the ground, so we cannot help but notice them, even were it not for the sickening, ghastly sight beneath them.

Tied, hand and foot, to the trunks of these trees, are three Texans, stripped naked. A gash extending right and left across their bellies has allowed the intestines to fall, so that they hang to the ground.

The same cross-mark gashes we saw upon the bodies at the whirlpool, disfigure forehead and breast, and streams of blood have left their trails from head to feet.

The arm of one is loosened from the tree, and by a string around the neck is made to hold a piece of tobacco to the mouth of the murdered man.

Another's jaw is bound with a buckskin string, and grimly holds a pipe between its teeth.

The tongue of the other is cut out from the roots, and—but enough. What I have told you is to prove the cowardice and brutality of the Mexican invaders of Texas, and I have not told a hundredth part of the bloody deeds that caused the cry to echo, and re-echo, through the chaparrals: "No quarter to Greaser Guerrillas! No mercy to the torturers and mutilators of Texans!"

No wonder that the trees which overhung the banks of the Rio Grande, on the American side, bore ghastly fruit, which swayed in the wind until the lariat which held it to the limb above was worn away, and it went dashing down with dull thuds, into the river!

No wonder that it became unsafe for any Mexican, guilty, or not guilty, to meet a Texan in the chaparrals on this side of the river. The committee of investigation, sent by government, traveled with a strong escort; they were not molested; it was poor policy for the Mexicans to interfere with them; neither did they believe one-half that was told them by the sufferers from these bandits, because they saw nothing of the miscreants; they were lurking in the bush on the Mexican side, reveling upon spoils of past robberies, and the committee

probably returned to Washington, hardly believing that any organized band of bandits ever infested the chaparrals!

CHAPTER XI.

BIG-FOOT WALLACE.

His uncombed hair in elf-locks spread
Around his bare and matted head;
On leg and thigh, close-stretched and trim,
Rent buckskin showed the sinewy limb.
Roughened the brow, the temples bared
And sable hairs with silver shaded,
Yet left—what age alone could tame—
The lip of pride, the eye of flame;
The full-drawn lip that upward curled,
The eye that seemed to scorn the world—
That lip that terror never blenched,
Ne'er in that eye hath tear-drop quenched.
Inured to danger's direst form,
Tornado, earthquake, flood and storm.
Death had he seen by sudden blow,
By wasting plague, by tortures slow.
By dart or lance, by steel or ball—
Knew all his shapes, and scorned them all.

"Cuss the sculpers, tha've cut my cat!
Youuns better squat awhile, inside. Boys,
this are the fust surprise-party she has had, an'
she feels kinder excited, an' a little wilted arter
her exartions to amuse the visitors. Keep
away, or she might take a hankerin' arter a
change o' meat. I'll just yank the dead reds
outen her chamber, wash her off, and intice her
in. I don't rec'on ther varmints had time tew
cut deep."

Before Big Foot had ceased speaking, Clown, Jack and Rely were in the cabin and the door closed.

Clown started a fire and began to inspect Big Foot's larder. He soon had venison steaks sputtering upon the coals, and the coffee-pot threw out its fragrant aroma. Having got things under way, for a good meal, Clown turned to his companions and said:

"Cheer up, Jack; you'll be all hunk in the mornin'. Miss Martha, you'll make a good Ranger. I see, by your looks, that this little difficulty between us an' the reds ha'n't set yer back any. Rec'on it don't matter if I call yer by yer right name hereabouts. Wonder if Big Foot knowed yer ware a female? He's had so much on his hands, that he wouldn't let on, if he did. Jack, old pard, yer had a ruff time on the run, but it might 'a' been wuss."

"Wall, Clown, I owes yer aunt her life, an' I can't think of the right words tew tell yer how I feel towards yer. I got a hard lick from that Red's lance, but I rec'on I'm good for another run. I war kinder mad when I heard yer shot, thinkin' Martha were with yer, an' in danger. I had ruther 'a' been laid out cold than she shu'd 'a' been taken, or killed. I couldn't ever looked in Mrs. Wells' face, or walked the plazas ag'in. My mustang I thought a heap on, but he'll never dance over the perraras no more. Miss Martha, I hope you are feeling well, so we can make a start in the mornin', fur I hate to linger here; I want to git you safe to the river, and sha'n't have any peace of mind till I do."

"Jack and Clown, you have no idea how I have suffered in my thoughts, for the last few hours. I have not been much frightened as to my own safety, but for yours; it would have destroyed my happiness forever to have either of you lose your life, because I have been the direct cause of your coming on this trip; I do hope, and pray, that we shall encounter no more such horrors; I do not think I was ever so terrified as I was when Big Foot let loose the panther among the Indians; I could not but help pity them, at the mercy of such a monster, although I am well aware that they would have been filled with pleasure could they have tortured us to the death had they captured us."

"It was certainly an original plan for Big Foot to take that method of saving powder."

At this moment the last mentioned person entered the door, loaded down with saddles and lariats, which he had taken from the Indian horses, and threw them down in one corner of the apartment, saying:

"Wall, boys, I see yer ter hum, an' that's the way ter do; just h'ist in all the grub yer can. You'll want tew feed big, when yer have it handy. It's no easy trip fur a woman. Rec'on I'll shake now with Miss Wells. Knowed yer mother when yer hair was shorter'n what 'tis now, if yer have cut her off. Yer make a good lookin' boy, dogoned if yer don't. How's yer marm, an' what's drivin' yer this-a-way? I seen John Moore, an' yer brother Clay, gliden to'ard the Bravo, six weeks ago."

"Did you see them, Mr. Wallace? I am now on my way to my brother, who was taken sick this side of the river. John, I suppose, is in Monterey. Jack and Clown very kindly agreed to escort me through, but I little expected to have met with danger so soon. We very narrowly escaped with our lives, and had it not been for the refuge afforded here in your cabin, and your noble exertions in ridding us of our enemies, we should now be either dead, or prisoners, which is worse."

"I like yer grit, gal, but it's a bad move, I'm afear'd; ther are more'n one war-party on the rampage between this an' the river, an' the varmints knows we are hard pressed by the Greasers. We rec'on on havin' a big squabble with

'em, within a week. Ther's a heap o' the cusses camped below, an' I start to-morrer tew be in when the lay-out are spread, an' I count on slingin' a few lead chips into the game, an' win every time. If I'd had my old reliable with me, I'd a' gone with the boys. I can't count on old Kentuck no longer, the gun's a gittin' wheasy, an' don't burn more'n half her powder. I rec'on if I don't run ag'in any Reds, I'll fetch the brush in time ter let 'em know I'm thar."

"If you do, Mr. Wallace, I would be very grateful to you if you would say to Mr. Booth that you saw me and the boys on the way to the Rio Grande, and the reason I am a-going, as Joe does not know that Clay is dangerously ill, and if they succeed in driving Cortina with his gang over into Mexico, that I wish Joe would try and get stationed near to the Guerrero ford, where my brother lays sick."

"I'll do it, Miss Wells. Joe has gone tew Brownsville, arter Old Rip Ford, an' will cum up when he dus, but what kinder name has Jack got hitched on tew yer, now yer playin' Ranger? Rec'on yer better stay a man, as yer are now, tew all appearances. I've got no use for females on the perraras, except female panthers. I goes heavy on *them*, an' I rec'on you'll go halves, now you've seen how b'utiful she welcomed her visiters."

"The boys call me Rely because I carry the 'old reliable' Sharpe's rifle, and they can catch the name easy, being used to that arm."

cream-skimmer, an' he still lingers, an' will, I rec'on, till the wust fiteen' are over in these States; but, see here, I'll take a bite with yer, and we'll all roll up fur a snooze, an' git ready tew git in the mornin'. I'm fur down country, an' you'uns, acrost yer nags is hunk. I've hobbed 'em out, and picked a peart mustang fur you, Jack, as you'rн's wiped out."

The simple meal was soon eaten; all rolled themselves in blankets upon the rushes, which were scattered over one corner of the room, and were soon asleep.

Early in the morning all were astir, and while Clown prepared the breakfast Jack jumped upon one of the Indian horses, bounded away on the back trail and soon returned with his saddle, bridle, blankets and tricks which he had taken from his dead mustang.

In an hour all were ready for the start and mounted.

Big Foot threw all his venison in to the panther, saying he had engaged a Mexican, who lived up the stream, to feed the animal every three days.

"An' now, boys, an' *Miss Reliable*, our trails branch off. Jack, keep yer eyes open if yer have to jam in sun terbacca to smart 'em intew keepin' so. Ther's Reds along the Neuaces arter loose stock an' sculps, an' yer must look sharp or yer'll loose your'n. I know yer a boss stage-man, but yer hain't had enuff perrara tew make yer tew cautious. Clown, yer sum on Reds,

toward the Rio Grande, we will flit again to the chaparrals.

Near to the second horse-shoe bend, in the Rio Grande, above the town of Edinburg, and about twenty miles from that town, was encamped Cortina with his bandit army. The camp was about two miles from the river in a large opening in the chaparrals of about ten acres in extent.

The United States government road, built at great expense, through the sea of briars, thorns and vegetable daggers, which led from fort Brown to the up-river military posts, and ran as near as possible parallel with the river, was between the camp of the guerrillas and the Rio Grande, and within one-half mile of their camp, south.

To the north, west and north-east of this opening was an impenetrable chaparral; to the south-east toward Fort Brown, the only portion of the camp from which an enemy could charge upon them, and then with great difficulty, a few guards were posted, more intent upon their own comfort than looking out for foes, which they had no idea were within hundreds of miles.

They knew, or thought they knew, that there was no force of sufficient numbers to have the audacity to attack them.

The news of the Rangers having returned to San Antonio from the Indian wars had not reached them, on account of the spies sent to



THEY DREW THEIR KNIVES, AND LIKE TIGERS LEAPED OVER THE DEAD BODY OF THEIR COMRADE TOWARD JACK.—Page 3.

"Well, that's cute, an' a good name tew. I wish they'd call me Sharpe's, or Colt either; I wouldn't kick at it, fur I've got tired of Big Foot. Look a ther! Do you'uns call them big huffs? Tew be sure it takes a hull buck-hide tew cover 'em. I have tew find a roomy openin' tew spread myself in, an' git outen the blankets tew turn over; but it takes a heap tew tip me when I'm balanced on 'em. Atascosa boys'll tell yer that I kicked ther Chanted Rock clean from Devil's river. Now, I'm ready tew swar, with my right claw on the Alamo-walls, that I never seen the rock 'till I scouted up that-a-way along of Col. Judson—some folks calls him Ned Buntline; that war long ago."

"Then you knew Ned Buntline, did you, Mr. Wallace?"

"Rec'on I did; an' most on the boys what war in the Mexican war knowed him. He war throu' that scrape, an' in the Seminole war. I heard Wild Cat tell a heap about what a cuss that Judson was tew fight. That war arter Wild Cat's part of the tribe located in Mexico; an' I rec'on he'd scratch Ned sum if he got a jump at him. He is a tuff one, that Judson. He's been drowned a few times, hung up fur seed, but they'll never projuce another like him, chawed up an' spit out, cut into steaks, jobbed thru' with knives, arrars, lances an' balls like a

I know, but yer young, an' rather fight than run or keep clear on it by watchin' ther ground. If yer see a trail, know afore yer leave it whar it's agoin'; an' if thar's any chances for 'em tew run ag'in' yer. If yer war alone yer needn't ter be so karefull, but that gall has a mother, an' you'uns better take care on her, or don't yer ever cross my section. Shake; I'm agoin' fur Greasers on ther jump, an' I kalkerlate we'll make 'em take water or wilt. Right thar!" and shaking the hands of Jack, Clown and Rely, Big Foot Wallace dashed down the San Miguel, mounted upon a powerful black half-breed, and was soon lost to view in the bottom timber.

The horrible scream of the panther, who seemed to know that her master had deserted her, caused the horses of our friends to tremble with fear as they forded the river and sped on to the south.

"Wonder whar the dead Reds have gone tew? The kayotes hain't eat 'em so quick, I know," said Jack.

"Big Foot sculped 'em last night an' slung 'em in the river. Come on; let's git clear of the timber an' see war we're agoin'. Rec'on we'll have tew make a dry camp at noon, and fetch the Rio Frio tew-night."

Leaving our heroine once more on the move,

that city to bring the news of any expedition being fitted out against them having been killed in the fandango by Jack Hodge and Clown, previous to their starting to the Rio Grande with Miss Martha Wells; consequently, the Guerrillas were not only careless but very imprudent in not having out proper guards.

They were, like the pirates of old, laying idle, carousing and gambling, having on hand supplies in large quantities, taken from the ranches which they had robbed and burned.

The central portion of the camp upon the little prairie were picketed mustangs, half-breeds, and mules by the hundreds, and in a brush-corral was confined a large number of fat beesves, which were dragged out and butchered as they wanted them.

All around the borders of this opening were the smoldering cañap-fires, and beneath the shade of the musquitos which fringed it, were strewn horse-furnishings, blankets, provisions, and cooking utensils.

From the canvas-covered wagons, of which there were half a dozen, the strong smell of aguardiente, muscal, and Paris wine hovered, and the constant stream of Creators, to an' from these wagons, to fill their gourds, told plainly that the bandits were having a regular drinking carouse.

Gambling was carried on all through the camp, and monte games were at nearly every camp-fire—a blanket spread upon the ground serving in place of a table.

Here and there were Mexicans, lying upon their blankets, sleeping off the effects of the deep potations they had indulged in. Flies by the thousands were hovering and buzzing over and about the sleeping forms, tormenting them with sharp bites.

There were at least six hundred Guerrillas in camp, besides those up and down the government road, drinking, sleeping, and gambling the time away.

For three months they had been sweeping up and down the river, committing dark and bloody deeds, with no power present to stop them or punish them.

They little thought that within half a night's ride of them were near three hundred desperate Texan Rangers, holding in their bosoms the hate of years and eager for revenge.

Just south of the government road, in a small opening, which would have been unnoticed until you broke into it, was encamped the chaparral fox, Cortina, and his officers and body-guard. They, too, were having a feasting and drinking bout, under a tent formed by brilliant-colored Mexican blankets, or serapes.

Cortina, the finest looking man among them all, was clothed in a complete suit of embroidered buckskin. The seams of jacket and leggings were ornamented with buttons made from Mexican gold coin, and a golden snake, with ruby eyes, coiled around his sombrero as a band.

You would little think, if you were so fortunate, or unfortunate, as to be in his presence, that you were gazing upon the most brutal murderer upon the American continent; an outlaw upon both sides of the Rio Grande, but so feared by his followers that they dare not betray him—a man who has been hunted by the sharpest scouts, shot at a hundred times, but who still gracefully, and with the becoming bravado of a Mexican bandit, appears here, there, and everywhere, when least expected—dancing at this fandango, or betting his stolen doubloons at that monte house, until all, Mexican or American, have been forced to believe that he bears a charmed life, or has made a contract with the Evil One—probably the latter is the most general conclusion among the ignorant denizens of the chaparrals.

But, we have glanced into his camp, and seeing how things are situated, we are better prepared for the events which hover over it beneath a blood-red sunset sky.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPY'S REVELATION.

The sun was slowly hiding his face in the chaparrals to the west as three companies of Rangers, commanded by John Donaldson, Mat Nolan, and John Littleton, came together from different directions, and encamped in a small prairie opening, some ten miles north-west of Edinburg.

There was no shouting, no confusion; everything was conducted in a quiet and orderly manner, as if the Rangers had been subjected to strict discipline, but it was just the reverse. Every man knew that the success of the campaign depended upon caution and silence.

The camp was well chosen, to be secure from observation, in a musquit opening, the trees standing in small clumps, at from forty to sixty feet apart.

As soon as the captains of the companies met, and were eagerly exchanging salutations and news, each of the heads of messes rode for the particular bunch of trees which was to be the camping spot of his mess, and divested his horse of the equipments, which were hung from the branches of trees—the other Rangers of his mess following his example.

The guard in the rear, having charge of the pack mules (there being one of these animals allowed to each mess of six men, to convey the provisions, and cooking utensils), left each mule at its mess.

In ten minutes the horses are staked out to graze, the mules unpacked, hobbled, and every man at his place, each engaged in his particular mess duty.

Every thing is as regular as clock-work, without any previous irksome drill, or discipline, for there are but few in the command who do not know the regular, self-imposed duties of a Ranger, that are necessary for his own and the company's safety.

The colonel or captain dips his chunk of cornpone into the same gravy, in the same frying-pan, as the Ranger. In fact, when the fight comes off, each man's business, in frontier warfare, is to be his own captain.

The bread was baked in the camp of the previous morning, and the barbecued beef needed but a slight warming through, so a small fire, sufficient to boil a pot of coffee (which no prairie meal is complete without), is all that is needed, and that for a short time—the thick chaparrals beyond and around completely hiding all the blaze, and the smoke not likely to be observed in such a level-wooded country.

After the suppers are eaten, and everything pertaining to the same had been placed handy for packing, then this or that Ranger is hunting a former Ranging companion, in some of the other companies. Sociable chats were indulged in, along with the pipe, and cigarette. The guards are posted outside the camp, and the horses are outside of them, but in plain view encircling the bivouac. Before dark, every horse will be feeding upon new ground, inside the guard line.

The low murmur of many voices hovers around, until the shrill scream of a panther from one of the scouts, stationed at some distance from the Rangers, at the approaches to the camp, warns them that humans of some kind are near them, and coming within the lines; they know they are friends, or a different signal would have greeted them.

Every man is upon his feet, gazing toward the quarter from whence proceeded the signal.

The rumbling tramp of a squad of horsemen upon the sward strikes their ears, and then a cavalcade of well-known forms break through the musquitos.

The Rangers flock from all quarters of the camp toward the newly-arrived men, and as they are recognized, hundreds of sombreros whirl over their heads, and the hiss of a rattlesnake breaks from the lips of every Ranger in the camp, causing the leaves to tremble, and whirl upon the trees, and filling the air with a strange, piercing sound, that would tear the nerves of some men into giblets.

At the scout line, this noise resembled the long-drawn sigh of a coming norther.

The rattle, the jump, and bite of the snake were to come, before another sun!

Not a word broke the silence that followed, when Colonel Ford, Kit Carson, Jr., Reckless Joe, and the remainder of their fellow-Rangers, from fort Brown (with the exception of Tom Clark, who had gone on ahead and branched off toward the bandit-camp to spy out the position of affairs with the Greasers), halted their mustangs in a group, and elevated their sombreros to the crowd of sun-burned, fire-browned Rangers of the Lone Star State.

They had evidently traveled far, and were greatly fatigued, and ready hands assisted to the care of their animals.

A warm shaking of honest hands followed.

"The sight of your face, Colonel Ford, is as cheering as a fresh spring, high up on the bracky Brazos. Come, all of you, to my mess, and take in your provinder."

"Do you hear that, me lords? Cap. bids us to the feast! By heavens, can this be thusly—that, amid these barren chaparrals can be found that which will cure the dreadful gnawings of hunger, which has run riot within me ventrical of digestion? Soon I'll be fitted to exclaim—'Joseph is himself again!' Kit, come sit beside me. I know your tongue will wag with words, causing your stomach to suffer, regardless of its emptiness, so I'll eat the more myself. If that corn-sack of dried beef this way! I'll make it grow visibly less, before your very eyes!"

"Less talk an' more feedin', Joe; but I needn't say that when you git started. Kit, as you say, can do the talkin' for the crowd, but he knows he must sling it in infant tones, here," said Col. Ford.

All hands were soon busily eating. Even Kit, for once, was mawn, for there was something in the deep silence of the camp, and so many men were there, that a person seemed to dread breaking it, even in the low tones which had been used so far.

The Rangers eat with an appetite which can only be enjoyed by those who live in the open air, and sleep upon mother earth.

After the meal, as the twilight deepened, the horses were brought in and picketed within the inner circle of the guards.

All were enjoying their pipes and cigarettes; in fact, your real *bona-fide* Rio Grande Ranger is an inveterate smoker of corn-shuck cigarettes, and mixes in with his frontier English, a good smattering of Spanish, in an off-hand, shoulder-shrugging style.

The murmur of low voices became once again hushed, as a second panther scream pierced the night air, and Tom Clark, mounted upon a fast-pacing, half-breed nag, rode up to Donaldson's mess, where the principal officers and scouts were congregated.

"Howde, pard's! all on yer! I'm stiffer'n a pane comish'ner. Sixty mile on a hard run, since I left yer, colonel. Swopped mustangs three times, without gazin' at ther brand. Give me a rest," and Tom slid off his horse, upon a blanket and rested his head on a saddle. It was too dark for the Rangers to see that he was as pale as death, his clothing torn by chaparral traveling, and his leggings stained with blood.

"Hunky boy, Tom!" said Col. Ford. "I knew you'd make the rifle, if 'twas to be done. Kit, sling him out some strong coffee. Joe, git out sum of yer rattlesnake-oil, and rub his joints. He's done hard ridin', now, for two days. Mighty big job to make his leagues in these cussed chaparrals; 'twouldn't be nothin' on the open prairies."

When Kit brought the coffee, and Joe was

loosening the leggings of Tom—the small brushwood, which had been thrown upon the embers of the camp-fire, blazed up, showing to both that Tom was wounded and in a dead faint.

"Gentlemen," said Kit, "Tom's hurt! Hustle around for water and bandages. Joe, get the pain-killer from my saddle-bags! Be lively!"

Kit ran his bowie-knife down, cutting the leggings clear of Tom's leg. His boot was pulled off with difficulty, and found to be soaked, and part filled with blood, which had flowed from a long, but not dangerous cut, upon his thigh. The hard riding, since the wound had been received, caused it to bleed freely.

Tom's leg was bathed; the wound bandaged; the pain-killer applied, and a strong dose of the same was forced down his throat. This revived him, and he sat up, looked wildly around, as the Rangers bathed his head.

"Made ther rifle, by the blood o' Crockett! Shoved her through; glided in hunk, without bu'stin'. Let's see how things war," said Tom, as he leaned his elbows on his knees, and covered his forehead and eyes with his hands.

"Don't bother yourself now, Tom; drink this coffee and take a bite. You are about famished, let alone the cut an' ride. You can tell us what's the news when you feel better," said Col. Ford.

"Yer right, colonel; my grinders have had a long rest; hain't seen any grub since I left yer yesterday, down-river, an' my stom-jacket's as empty as a Greaser's head. Sling along sumthin' what's solid an' n'urishin'. Everything's hunk up-river, pard's, so don't fret yersel's."

The whole Ranger force, with anxious faces, stood around the mess of Donaldson, but not pressing near enough to incommodate those engaged in attending upon the scout.

They watched every motion of the wounded man, knowing that in a measure the success of the coming attack upon the bandit camp depended upon information he had obtained, and the manner of his obtaining the same.

The question was, had Tom alarmed the Guerrillas, in the combat in which he had been in when the wound was received? But those who knew Tom best were perfectly satisfied that such was not the case, by his manner, and by his former way of doing business of like character.

No one spoke a word as Tom eat, as well as he could, in his exhausted condition, the food placed before him by his brother Rangers.

Col. Ford and the captains sat near waiting for him to satisfy himself, when they knew he would give an account of his scout, and explain his wound; also the condition and situation of the bandit camp.

When Tom's appetite was satisfied he shoved himself up against the saddle behind him, and leaned his head upon his hands a moment, then glanced around the circle of Rangers, and addressed them:

"There's a heap on yer on the anxious-seats ter-night, an' I'll sling my salmon intew a few brief remarks. I lit out hunk, from our camp, down-river, and dashed er good till my na' war torn sum, by the chaparral, an' struck dirt ruther heavy with his huffs. Then I slid in toward their gov'ment road, ter git another hoss. I roped a stray, an' changed my saddle, then got ready ter cut inter the bush ag'in, when I see a Greaser cummin' up their trail, but he didn't git his gazers on me, yer bet!"

"I bid my mustang in ther brush, an' laid fur the cuss with my rope, one end fast tew a musquit tree, clost tew me. When the Greaser came alongside o' my hidin'-place he war in a deep study on how tew git up another reverlution arter he'd got all stole this side the river that war wuth stealin'. He war figerin' on ther exact words of ther pronunci'mento he war intendin' ter issue, when the noose of my lariat fell in love with his neck.

"He war a fust cut (Greaser, you might kno', or these things I've mentioned w'u'd not 'a' been in his head, an' afore he got 'em out or knew what exactly ware up, his spurs went fur blud, an' he went fur the dirt about as quick as lubricated lightnin', fur his nag had biz up the river, or thought he had, by the way the spurs lit intew him, an' the musquit tree didn't care tew go.

"I thought ther cuss had gone tew the red-pepper reg'ns, sure, and loosened the rope, an' ware musin' on ther chances of life an' deeth on the Rio Grande, an' givin' an' eye up and down the road when I got that cut from ther yaller-belly, and had tew bleed him tew make him more docile.

"Don't yer fret, colonel, I dragged ther Montezuma intew ther bush afore I eased him off ag'in, an' left no sign on their trail; smoothed her over with a bush. I was tuck back now by his nag, thinkin' ther animals might tell tales, so I kinder scouted up ther road, found him feedin', roped him an' tuck him in ther bush in ther lead, an' that's the quadrupid what I cum in on; he's right peart on ther pace, as yer probably noticed.

"Wall, all strait, so fur. I then slid thr'u' ther chaparral north, whar I left the nag I rode in here, and put fur the cut-throat camp.

"I knew just whar tha war by ther buzzards; ther war heaps on 'em hoverin' over ther Greaser camp. Left my horse an' snaked it thr't the

bush, with a wuss scratchin' than Big Foot's panther c'u'd 'a' gi'n me.

"I had a dead sure thing on it when I got clost in tew thare camp. The hull lay-out war spre'd afore me. Fact on it was, thar was a good many lay-outs, for monte, on ther squar' off, war agoin' in about every bunch of Greasers.

"They have took sum waguns frum the ranches, an' got 'em loaded down with sumthin' that flops 'em over tew grass; ther war a heap on 'em on ther snoose.

"It's a sizey camp, but I rec'on we've got the softest thing out, tew catch 'em nappin'. I didn't see ther boss, Cortina, or I rec'on my "old reliable" w'u'd 'a' gone off on ther half-cock and 'a' sp'iled their biz.

"If tha expects ther Greaser what I run ag'in down river, fur—as I said, he war a reg'lar sport, an' like enuff a pard of ther boss Greaser—why, he won't cum; an' all I hav' tew say is, that this good-lookin' crowd, countin' in myself, hav' got tew do some tall shootin' an' cuttin' afore ther sun comes ter-morra mornin', or stand a chance tew lose what's now a dead sure thing.

"Pass another drink o' that coffee, Joe; I'm as dry as a Mormon sarmon, and clean gone fur a snoose. We can fetch up at thar camp by four in ther mornin' an' start at midnight; I kno' the trail clean thr'u."

An exultant and gratified expression rested upon the features of every man.

The hand of Col. Ford stole within the grasp of Tom Clark's fingers: he pressed them with great thankfulness for the service the daring Ranger had rendered the State in the very hazardous undertaking of spying on the camp of an enemy, who would have exulted in torturing had they captured him.

Tom swallowed his coffee and sunk down upon his former resting-place. A number of blankets were doubled, a soft bed made, upon which brotherly hands lifted the now half-asleep Tom.

Joe sat by his side, whisking away the torturing insects which infest the chaparrals.

Low spoken orders from Col. Ford were passed from man to man, to have all arms inspected by their owners, and everything ready for a midnight march upon the bandit camp.

In half an hour after Tom Clark fell asleep all the Rangers were rolled in their blankets, except the guard, to take a short repose before starting.

How many, think you, thought upon the probability of its being their last sleep, except the sleep of death?

I venture to say the number was small, for they were men who did not stop to *think* of the danger of a move—men to whom danger and death had been next door neighbors—brave even to recklessness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLOODY FRAY.

'Twas then in hour of utmost need
He proved his courage, art and speed;
Now slow he stalked with steady pace,
Now started forth in rapid race.
* * * * *

His look grew fixed, his cheek grew pale;
He sunk before he told his tale;
For all his desperate, daring ride
A dagger wound was in his side.
* * * * *

Comrades leave him here a little,
Let him rest till early morn—
Leave him here, and when we want him
Sound upon the bugle-horn!

When round them as the bugles blew,
Their arms three hundred Rangers drew.
* * * * *

'Twere hard to tell of this battle's roar
As swept the fight along the shore—
What reins were tightened in despair
As Texan yells rung through the air!
* * * * *

One dying look he upward cast
Of wrath and anguish—'twas his last.
* * * * *

So did the deep and darksome pass
Devour the battle's mingled mass;
None linger now upon the plain,
Save those who ne'er shall fight again.

THE moon was shining brightly, as the Rangers saddled up at a quarter to twelve o'clock, on the night that Tom Clark brought in the intelligence from the bandit camp.

The camp tricks, pack-mules and extra horses were left behind in charge of a small guard.

At midnight the columns of Rangers were winding snake-like through the chaparrals. Col. Ford and Tom Clark, (the spy having recovered somewhat from the exhaustion and wound that had prostrated him the evening before,) were in advance acting as guides.

As silently as practicable they made their way, tearing through the thorny brush from one opening to another for nearly four hours, when they found themselves in the vicinity of the camp of the Guerrillas.

A hiss from the lips of Col. Ford was passed from lip to lip, down the long line, bringing them to a halt.

Col. Ford detached Mat Nolan's and John Litton's companies—one to charge the bandits from the position they now occupied; the other to branch off a hundred yards above, and taking Donaldson and his men south to enter the gov-

ernment road between the Greaser camp and their pickets.

The gobble of a turkey was to be the signal for making ready, and a panther scream for the grand charge of the Rangers.

The loud laughter, the frequent cry of "Brindo a la salud de Cortina," (I drink to the health of Cortina,) the "Carracas," "Malditos," heap'd upon the tontos Gringos, showed plainly that the bandits were carrying on their carouse into the night, and that they little thought the Texans they were cursing so frequently, were within a pistol shot of them, preparing to scatter death through their camp.

This noise and confusion were favorable to the Rangers, as it would prevent the Mexicans from hearing the whisking of the branches as the Texans were making their way near enough for the charge to be more sudden and overwhelming.

Probably many of the bandits thought strange to hear the prolonged gobble of a turkey near their camp, for no ranche was near, and no turkeys were in the chaparral, but, before the strangeness of the sound struck through their somewhat muddled brains, a more bewildering and terrific sound pierced their ears.

The shrill scream of a panther was followed by the dull thunder of a thousand hoofs, and then the dread Texas yell, from near three hundred throats rung through the chaparral.

The crashing and cracking of branches—the snort and plunge of deep-spurred steeds, and a sight burst upon the bandits' bewildered eyes that turned their yellow cheeks to a ghastly hue.

Those sleeping in their blankets awoke in horror and fear, only to die, for that long irregular line of Texans was presented to their view but an instant, before a scathing sheet of fire burst out along the whole easterly side of their camp, and the rattling thunder of hundreds of Colt's revolvers sent their leaden messengers of death among the Guerrillas.

Down came the avalanche of vengeance over them.

Down thundered the thousand hoofs, crushing the bones and crushing the life from all before them!

Many of the bandits' horses broke loose and stampeded wildly about, trampling their own masters to death, and assisting in their defeat.

The first portion of the camp charged upon was one mass of dead and gasping bandits; but when the Rangers once more formed in line, and prepared to charge over the space occupied by the animals and corral, the Guerrillas on the westerly side of the camp were mostly mounted, many of them riding bare-back, and ready to meet the Rangers, but in a confused mass.

They would have retreated had it been possible for them to penetrate the chaparrals in their rear.

Cortina, with his officers and guard, now joined his disheartened and confused cutthroat band; and the loud cries of "Vive Cortina!" filled the air, as he yelled to them, "Courage, soldiers!" (Courage, soldiers!) "Tenez fermes!" (Stand firm!)

The vociferations of the Mexicans was drowned by the deafening thunder and blinding flash of the rifles of the whole Ranger force, as they fired across the opening into the robber-ranks, mowing them to the earth by scores before their chief could form them into order.

The rifle-straps were dropped over the saddle-horns of the Rangers; their revolvers were again drawn, cocked, and held pointing downward at arm's length behind the leg; the left hand held the bridle rein firmly, and every man braced himself for another grand charge.

No orders were given, but each Ranger knew what to do and when to do it.

Once more the Texan yell!

Once more the overwhelming wave of vengeance rolled toward the bandits. Fast flew the hail of lead from both sides—many of Cortina's men having revolvers, and nearly all escopetas.

Right into the masses of Mexicans charged the Texans, "Remember the Alamo!" ringing through the blood-tainted air.

Muzzle to muzzle! Steel to steel!

The horrible shrieks of wounded and maddened mustangs; the yells of agony, despair, fear, and death; the almost endless rattle of revolver shots; the louder detonations of the Sharpe's rifles; the malditos of the Mexicans; the war-cries of the Texans; the swish of lariats through the air; the sickening smell of burnt powder and human bodies all were at length shrouded in a pall of dense smoke, which soon masked friend from foe.

"Demonias Gringos! demonias del inferno!" came from the terrified bandits, as they huddled together amid the smoke.

The rallying yell of Colonel Ford brought the Rangers, panting, powder-grimed, and blood-stained, from out the smoke of battle, to hastily reload, amid the slain, in that portion of the camp first charged.

The bandit chief now collected his men together, next the line of chaparral, and behind the smoke which was slowly lifting from the field, to make a desperate dash for the government road to the south.

They would have to run the gauntlet of the

Rangers' rifles to gain it, but it was their only salvation.

Cortina was in advance, with a dozen of his body-guard riding between him and the Texans, to shield their chief from harm.

The thick smoke, the indiscriminate mixture of friend and foe, had rendered it useless to carry on the battle at the time the Rangers were recalled by Colonel Ford to the eastern portion of the camp.

The Rangers were now reloaded and preparing for another charge, when, out through the smoke, hugging close to the border of the chaparrals, dashed the Guerrillas.

"Give 'em blue beans, boys, in place of the black ones they gave the Mier prisoners!" yelled Colonel Ford, and another galling fire from the rifles of the Texans hurtled through them.

The weapons of the bandits, fired on the run, flew wild and did but little execution, but Tom Clark, weak and faint from his wound of the previous day, was unluckily enough to be struck with a ball, and as he sunk forward and grasped his horse's mane for support, he called upon Kit Carson to go for Cortina.

"Don't let ther cuss slip yer. 'Twas him what sent the pill at me."

Maddened by the fall of Tom, Kit drove his spurs home, and charged alone at the guard of the bandit chief, letting fly a fusilade of revolver shots among them, and then, with the quickness of thought, his lasso whirled through the air, the noose falling directly over the head of Cortina; but in an instant the rope was severed by the knife of a guard, and down thundered the main body of the bandits in a surging mass, nearly cutting Kit off from his friends, a dozen bullets whistling about him.

Three deadly volleys from the rifles of the Rangers cut through the Guerrillas before the last of them entered the government road.

Then the loud, exultant laugh of Old Rip Ford broke out, as he yelled to his men:

"We've got 'em, boys! there in the trap. Give them enough of Texas lead to keep 'em on their own side of the river, if they ever get there!"

In one dense, disordered crowd, the Greasers were huddled in the road, which was bordered on both sides by a chaparral so thick and thorny that a snake of any size would have found it difficult to penetrate. For a quarter of a mile this road was as straight as an arrow.

Now it was, as the hail of balls cut through them, that they saw, too late, that it would have been better for them to have cut their way through the Rangers, to the east, than to have entered this narrow road, within which nearly half their number lay weltering in blood.

The messengers of death flew thick and fast among them from the Texans in their rear, who had every advantage, and they no chance to return the fire.

Sixty bandits fell dead in as many yards.

Down dashed the Rangers, over the dead, and crushing the life from the wounded, in swift pursuit. An opening bordered on the road as it turned toward the river, three-fourths of a mile from the bandits' camp. The Mexicans came to this opening, but they knew there was no safety in their making a stand; the river was the only point of safety.

But coming across the opening, past which their course of retreat lay, is that which makes their sallow cheeks a shade more ghastly, and deepens the horror and fear which the battlefield behind has stamped upon their features, and which the thundering hoofs of the pursuing Texans has frozen there.

Two horsemen are coming across the small prairie like the wind. But, why should two fight a robber crew, of near two hundred men? Because they know that wholesale death, of which they have had enough for one day, always marks the trails of those whom they see bounding toward them.

Mounted upon a coal-black mustang, that springs toward the Greaser ranks as though the animal was a partner with his master in the hate and detestation he bears to those before him, on comes *Big Foot Wallace!*

His sombrero is lashed to his saddle, his hair flies free behind, the bridle-rein hangs loosely over the saddle-horn, two large Colt's revolvers fill the holsters, ready for use at a half-cock, and two more hang from his belt, while his hands are occupied with his "Old Reliable," which he is about to bring to his shoulder.

A little to the south of Big Foot—wild and haggard, with bloodshot eyes, and in tattered buckskin rags, his long, unkempt hair flying like a Comanche warrior's, his forehead to the eyebrows daubed with blood-red, beneath which his black, piercing eyes flash hate, bounds *Wild Will!*

He is bareback upon a mustang, whose sweeping tail, long mane and wildness, show a recent capture, a raw-hide rope around the under jaw to control the animal, but turn right or left too much, a blow from a long, glittering saber upon the side of the head, throws the horse back to his course. A Colt's revolver in the right hand of Will shows he means that to do its work before he gets near enough for the saber, which an Indian or Mexican dreads more than any other weapon.

In sheaths, running down each boot-leg, are two huge bowie knives.

The Guerrillas, with cries of terror, drive the long rowels of their spurs into the flanks of their mustangs, and strive to get ahead of the two avengers, but in vain; the Sharpe's rifle of Big Foot is now at work at long range; a bandit reels, grasps at empty air, and falls beneath the clattering hoofs at every discharge.

On, on, come the avengers! Cortina and his guard in advance seem likely to escape contact with this last danger, as they are better mounted than their followers.

The bandits fire a few scattering shots, which fly over the heads of Big Foot and Wild Will.

The Greasers leave the road, and make for a gully which the water has worn down into the Rio Grande, but which is now dry.

The avengers are nearly on them, quartering as they run.

The rifle strap of Big Foot slips over the horn of his saddle; out come the two revolvers, one in each hand, and with the wild Texas yell bursting from his powerful lungs, he is among them, the quick, sharp reports of his revolver sounding in their ears, and every shot sending a bandit to his long home.

To stop in their retreat is certain death, for the thunder of the Rangers is close in their rear.

They seem powerless and paralyzed with fear.

Right and left they drop and cover the trail with dead.

Through and through their ranks dashes Big Foot, the giant of the border, death marking every plunge of his coal-black steed.

Not a movement escapes him, not a bandit raises his weapon that does not draw a shot from Big Foot, that ends forever his guilty life.

On come the Rangers. They had gained upon the Guerrillas, and were just about to open fire again, when Big Foot and Wild Will were seen cutting the columns of their flying foes asunder.

The Rangers held their breath with admiration and deep concern at the sight of the charge of two upon nearly two hundred, but they speed on over the dead and dying victims of Wallace and Will.

But, what has become of Wild Will? His maniac yell sent a shiver of horror down through the flying bandits as he charged among them with his giant comrade, and then madly plunging on his untamed steed, he urged the animal down past the flying horde toward its front, his saber at intervals cleaving the air and descending upon the doomed head of the Mexican who happened to be near him.

Why does he leave Big Foot?

We will follow him, and see.

He makes furiously past all the flying Mexicans. There are none ahead except Cortina and his guards, and they are nearing the gully which leads to the river.

The object of Will is evident; he is after the blood of the bandit chief, and even this man, who fears neither God or man, trembles in his boots as he turns in his saddle, and sees the madman avenger, close upon his trail.

Suddenly a smile of demoniac pleasure spreads over the face of Cortina. He turns his horse away from the course toward the gully; he motions his guard to keep on, and pushes on to the south himself, so as to strike the river a hundred yards from the gully, where the bank is sheer down one hundred feet to the water.

Wild Will gallops on after Cortina. The maniac and the bandit chief are now coming to close quarters. Will lashes his horse with his long saber, until the animal flies over the low bushes like the wind.

Cortina's horse bounds toward a point where a few scraggy musquits stand higher than the others. He evidently knows his ground well. He halts his horse, and turns him half around so the broadside of the animal is toward Will, the horse's head pointing up the river.

Not three feet beyond the horse, sheer off down the dizzy height, run the sluggish waters of the Rio Grande. A wild, insane laugh of triumph bursts on the air from the lips of Will, as, holding his saber in his right hand, he draws a bowie-knife from his boot, and plunges the point into the hams of his mustang.

With snorts of terror and pain, the poor beast leaps madly toward Cortina, the dreaded saber flashing at either side of the head to guide the animal; right on to the bandit chief bounds the maddened steed, and more maddened rider.

Cortina sits coolly waiting, to meet the charge. A few more bounds and these men will come together in mortal combat, or—what will happen?

The horse of Will is again tortured by the cruel knife of the master, so eager for blood; but a single bound separates them, as both spurs of Cortina are dashed into his horse's flanks, burying them deep in the quivering flesh of the animal, who springs and plunges forward.

The saber of Wild Will hisses through the air behind the head of the bandit chief, and the madman and his horse, with fearful momentum, crash through the musquits which border the high bank, and down, down, they plunge, from the fearful height! One instant they are seen, as they cut the air with the velocity of lightning,

and then the muddy waters close over them forever.

Cortina, with the laugh of an exultant fiend bursting from his lips, speeds like the wind to rejoin his command; he just escapes being cut off and captured; he reaches the river and urges his horse into the raging torrent. Why do not the waters engulf him as they had his poor victim a moment before? Justice echoes, *why!*

The flying Guerrillas come flocking down like frightened sheep, so huddled together as to impede the general progress. Their horses are completely fagged, and the Rangers in their rear, are pouring into their reduced ranks a galling fire, strewing the deep gully with dead.

Col. Ford, Big Foot, Kit Carson, Rockless Joe, Mike and others dismount, and station themselves on the high bank of the river, and the long-range Sharpe's rifles are now brought into use.

One after another of the bandits, madly buffeting with the current to gain their native shore, throw up their arms and sink beneath the waters as the balls from the Rangers' rifles penetrate their heads or backs as they swim. They dot the river for a long distance down the stream.

They struggle out, one by one, climb up the steep, treacherous banks, and hasten to hide in the dense chaparrals of the Mexican side.

The horse of Cortina carried his master faithfully to the opposite side of the river, upon which the animal could gain no foothold, and exhausted, sunk beneath the waves, while the bandit chief clambered up the bank in safety, amid a shower of balls.

The most of his guard also escaped, they having been best mounted and first at the river, but one of them having his hatred augmented by his over-exertions, his fear dispelled by distance, and standing upon his native soil, very imprudently turned toward the group of Texans on the American side, and clapped his hand to his nose in a taunting, insulting manner.

Before he had performed the gesture long enough to show the contempt he bore them, half a dozen rifles belched fire, and sent the lead over the waters of the Rio Grande.

As the smoke lifted, the Rangers gazed across and saw Lieutenant Ocho, who was a favorite officer of Cortina, throw his hands to his forehead, stagger backward over the abyss he had just surmounted, and plunge down into the Bravo, to keep company with his cut-throat band.

Big Foot wiped out his rifle, and reloaded with the others, as he remarked:

"Wall, Colonel Ford, I rec'on we fotched that cuss ruther han'sum. 'Twere as long a shot as I ever seen tuck, what bro't meat. I'd ruther like ter kno' what we'pon slung ther ball. If it warn't mine, I'd giv' a half a dozzan saddle-nags fur it, dog-goned 'f er won't. I rec'on it would be a hard matter to decide, as six of us fired, and all the same bore, an' danged if I care, as long as it fotched the yaller cutthroat."

"The shot was worth a thousand dollars to the State," said Colonel Ford.

"Sure an' if it's not too much botherin' to get a hould ev the money, I'd be afther takin' me solemn oath that I'm holding the gun meself, fur it was a double dose o' powther I was afther puttin' in the same, kno'in' it was a long ways to shoot I had. I can 'asy prove that same, 'coz the mate it's smashed frum me shoulthers, fur it's both triggers I pulled at onc'e, an' I thought sure the bank had broke, an' burried me up entirely."

A hearty laugh greeted Mike's speech as he tore away his shirt, disclosing a black and blue bruise upon his shoulder, made by the kick of the gun.

"Look here, Mike," said Kit, who had just noticed the gun Mike held in his hand, "what have you done with the Sharpe's rifle I loaned you, and how came you by that thing?"

"Sure, Misher Kit, me darlint, don't be angry wid me. I was bothered wid loadin' so often, an' I seen a Grazer havin' this beauty ev a gun, wid two shootin' places, an' I whacked him over an' tuck the same, he makin' no object'ons as to me makin' the thrade wid him, be the rason he was sp'achless forver. Sure it's to the devil, his master, he's gone wid scores ev his murtherin' blackg'ard brothers, to kape him cosy along the road, an' pon me soul, I'm thinkin' ther'll be a rumpus in the infarnal rag'ons whin they goes scamperin' in a bunch to the'r future home, an' the devil'll have a lively time ev it, a-fixin' accumadations for them all."

"I'll tell you what it is, Mike, you must find that rifle, for I wouldn't lose it on no consideration. Westcott, the president of the factory where it was made, gave me that gun, an' I think a heap of it. But I say, Big Foot, what became of Wild Will?"

"Tell yer what 'tis, Kit, you've just struk ther thing what's meanderin' in my mind. He lit in on ther Greasers when I did, struk' acrass in ther bush abuv' here, afore I struk' the openin', whar I seen ther cutthroats. I war so taran' bisy with ther cusses, that I lost my pard. I seen Cortina, down river, cummin' up frum whar he had no biz alone, an' I'm goin' tew folter his trail, an' see ef ther's any sine o' Will. Cur'us what's cum on him," and Big Foot start-

ed down the river-bank, whilo the Rangers gathered together and prepared to return toward the battle-field.

Many of the Mexicans sprung from their horses, as they gained the river, and their mustangs were now galloping in every direction, many of them badly wounded. These last, were shot, to end their misery.

The Rangers, half-dead with fatigue, hunger, and thirst, now started on the return, over the trail of blood, and death.

Big Foot came loping to the head of the column, from his search down the river, for some sign of Wild Will.

"Well, Big Foot," said Colonel Ford, "what luck about your pard?"

"Just the w'ist luck I c'u'd fetch. Will has knocked his last Red, or Greaser, but he made a big dio of it. It tuck a hundred foot jump, an' twenty foot o' water, on ther end on't, tew make him wilt. Cortina set a trap fur him, an' baited it with hisself—pertended tew meet him on ther squar', an' when Will went fur him, brash on ther jump, he gi'n his nag the spur, an' instid of cumin' kersmash on Cortina, Will, who had stampede speed on, glided clean thro' ther musketeers, an' made a flyin' leap intew ther Bravo, an' kingdom cum', kerflop. Wall, Will never tuck much curmfut, an' sp'iled a heap o' hoss-flesh, but he war wuth a dozen other men, for cle'nin' out Reds an' Yaller-bellies. I don't kno' nobody that'll miss him mor'n me, an' I hopes he'll hav' a smoother time on it whar he's gone. I don't pertend tew say whar that are, but I does say that he had it hot enuf here, whilst he stayed with us, an' I'll miss him wuss'n if I'd lost my panther-cat."

"Gentlemen," said Kit Carson, "I am pained at the tragic end of Will more than I can tell with empty words. There was a dark and misty veil hanging as a blur upon his brain, caused by we know not what, and for all the wildness and strangeness of his actions, and cruelty to his beast, we know he was not responsible.

"His fearful, grand leap into the arms of death was appropriate to his character, and judging from the life of the man, in days past, it was just such an end as he would have chosen. Let us hope he is better off than when his wild, untamable mind hurried his poor body through privations which would have killed any other man. Let us remember his faults as the results of a deranged imagination, and form our ideas from what we know he must have been before some great and horrible event destroyed his reason. There was one thing about him which will always make frontiersmen remember him with respect—he knew not the meaning of fear, and braved a thousand deaths before he lost his life by over zeal in avenging the wrongs and crimes perpetrated upon the men and women of the border. In fact, let us remember that Wild Will lost his life in trying to kill, in fair fight, the worst enemy the Lone Star State ever had—Juan Cortina, the bandit chief."

"Kit," said Big Foot, "put her right thar; yer shakin' an honest hand, what don't cross palms with ev'ry man he meets. I like yer, dog-goned ef I don't, 'ca'se yer talk white, an' ei yer ever git inter a tight fix, an' want a pard what sticks tew the de'th, then call on Big Foot, what's got a h'art as big as his foot tew share with them what's squar' as you is. I'm yer fr'end frum this day out, an' don't fergit it. I 'a' mixed with heaps o' humans in my many trails about the c'untry, an' I kno' ther ring of an honest tongue. I thank yer kindly, Kit, fur lettin' fly a good word fur my wild pard. I ha'n't known much on yer, but yer uncle, old Kit, an' I hav' slipped over many a hundred leagues o' plain an' wood together. I'm thinkin' you'll not disgrace yer famly name."

"I thank you kindly for your friendship, Wallace. You are king of the prairies, as your namesake of Scotland was of the highlands, and your good will I prize more than gold; but, Joe, we had better ride on and see to Tom Clark and the woundet boys. When our pards are suffering we must hasten to relieve them."

"Lead on, me lord, and though the path be strown with blood and dead, and the ghastly slain do mock me with their glassy glaring eyes, I'll follow and falter not; but haste to bind the wounds of me brother knights. By all the gods of war it was a goodly fight, and long to be remembered by yon greasy, fleeing crew, who now do hide themselves within the confines of their own dunghills. Lead on, friend Kit, I'll follow."

"Hold on, boys," said Col. Ford; "your company is too good to lose; we'll all lope ahead," and turning in his saddle, the colonel waved his sombrero as a signal to the Rangers to follow, and the whole command, in a slow lope, proceeded toward the battle-field where the wounded needed their assistance.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAMP ANGEL.

THE road where the dead were huddled in heaps was passed; the main camp of the bandits was in plain view as the glorious southern sun burst in splendor above the chaparrals.

Hundreds of mustangs, mad with fear and wounds, were tearing and staggering here and

there through the thorny thickets in every direction, and orders were given for them to be herded, driven into the corral of the bandits, and the wounded animals to be shot.

As the whole command were about to scatter to collect the wounded and dead Rangers, the galloping of horses was heard down the government road to the east, and all eyes were turned in amazement toward a very strange sight for the time and place.

A beautiful woman, mounted upon a magnificent black horse, that seemed proud of its burden, came dashing up the road.

The woman was an American—that was plain at a glance, and a graceful horsewoman.

Behind her a few paces rode a young lad upon a small Mexican pony, who so much resembled the lady as to show at a glance they were mother and son.

Some distance behind these two were a group of horsemen, some in United States uniform and some in Ranger costume, who appeared to be leading by lariats two Mexican prisoners, who were tied to the horses they rode.

On bounded the black horse with its queenly rider.

Col. Ford spurred his horse forward a few bounds, as did Kit and Joe; they shaded their eyes from the glare of the sun; then, with a yell threw up their sombreros.

Col. Ford rode down through the Rangers, shouting:

"Cheer, boys, cheer! and a welcome for Kate Luby, coming to attend to our wounded pards, with doctors from Fort Brown!"

Up to the east of the bandit camp spurred the Rangers, *en masse*, and with rousing cheers, that made the chaparrals ring as they never rung before, and sounded afar over the Rio Grande to the ears of the remnant of the late powerful band of Cortina's Guerrillas—thus the Texans welcomed Kato Luby, the guardian angel of the Rangers of the Rio Grande.

Col. Ford advanced and dismounted with Kit and Joe to receive her, and even Big Foot Wallace, who had no use for women on the frontiers, sprung lightly from his horse, and imprisoned her delicate palm in his gristly fist, with a smile resting upon his features, unlike any which had ever been seen upon his stern visage before.

But while Kate Luby was passing her words of kindly greeting with the Texan heroes, her eyes fell upon Tom Clark, beneath the shade of a musquit tree, where he had lain since receiving his last wound.

She immediately alighted from her horse, threw the reins to Kit, and motioning for her son Fred, to come with her and attend with the bandages and lint, she knelt by Tom's side, and examined the wound on his arm.

Kate soon had men bringing water, and the position of each wounded Ranger pointed out to her.

The doctors from fort Brown belonged to the U. S. Army, and had kindly volunteered to accompany Kate on her errand of mercy—she informing them, at a reasonable time after the departure of Colonel Ford, that a battle was sure to follow after the meeting of the Rangers below the bandit-camp.

The wounded were tenderly cared for, Kate insisting upon her own hands preparing bandages and bathing wounds, throughout the trying scenes, and her words of kindness, and cheer, were received by the wounded Rangers as from angel lips.

After the arrival of the doctors, Phil Cole and Ben Thompson came in, looking pale and thin from the wounds received in fort Brown, at the Monte Crib fight; but the two Mexican prisoners which they led by their lassoes, told that they had not been idle on the march. The two prisoners were bound to their own horses, and the lariats of the boys looped around the necks of the bandits' horses, made it impossible for them to escape.

As the two Mexicans beheld the camp of their chief strewn with the ghastly remains of their former comrades in crime, they trembled and cowered down upon their horses' necks, in abject fear.

"Hallo, pards, howde? Whar in thunder did yer catch them yaller cusses? Thot we'd cleaned out the hull caboodle. I'm dog-goned glad yer got 'em, anyhow, fur we've got a use fur 'em, ther danged murderin' varmints. See here, Ben, what yer think? That hifalutin', demorelized son ev a squaw, Cortina, played a danged queer game on my pard, Wild Will, an' run him of'en ther high-bank intew ther drink. Now, we can just hang these cutthr'uts, each side o' the gap, whar Will went over, ter sho' ther chapar'el fox that we kno' ther game he played, an' can double on him, altho' it w'd take forty sich skum tew git even on ther game. What yer say, boys? Duz my plan suit yer? I'll just sling a few plain English tow Ford about ther matter," and Big Foot started after Colonel Ford to get his ideas on the plan proposed.

Colonel Ford came galloping up to where his favorite scouts and captains were congregated at the same time that Big Foot came from speaking with Phil and Ben.

"I want a word with yer, colonel," said Big Foot. "Them pesky cutthr'uts, them yaller Montezumas, what ther boys has cotched, ortn't

tew live long, an' I propose to pitch a rope round ther necks, an' scrouge 'em of'en the bank, whar Cortina skuted Will over, unbekno'nt tew himself. 'Tisn't no use to kick up a rumpus about it. We'll let 'em glide out'en this world with a good squar' sight at ther own country right afore 'em, an' I call it a right smart show o' considerin' fur ther feelin's tew do so."

While the colonel was listening to Big Foot, Ben and Phil rode up with the prisoners.

"Them's 'um," said Big Foot, "an' my fingers is itching tew git a rope around ther greasy necks, an' rid the State of sich villa'n'us lookin' ladrones. I vow they've got tew die, anyhow."

At this moment Ben Thompson beckoned Colonel Ford up to his side, and spoke to him, saying:

"I rec'on, colonel, you'd not hesitate long as to the disposal of these things—I'll not call them men—but I suppose Kate Luby has not spoken a word to you in regard to the circumstances connected with the capture of these miscreants; tain't her style."

"No, she don't sling a word only in regard to our wounded boys, Ben. Spit her out."

"I'll tell you, in a few words. These two are all that's left of eight who escaped from here. They were the down road pickets, I rec'on, and skedaddled when you boys went in on the yell and shoot. They hid themselves in the chaparrals, and fired on us. If you take a close look at Kate Luby's fancy hat you'll see where a bullet tore away some of the fixin's, and another ball went through her skirts—just cleared her stirrup-foot, and went under her horse. The rest of the party are laid-out cold, and we propose to hang these two up as scare-crows, as Big Foot has explained to you.

"We have found some of our rancheros tied to trees, murdered and mutilated by the infernal fiends, and others were floated down the river, after you left fort Brown, the most horrible sight you ever saw, and that is saying a good deal."

Colonel Ford held up his hand, saying:

"Stop right there, Ben; thair fate was sealed afore you said a word. We give no quarter here, as they never had any mercy on our boys. String as many on the musquits as you catch; they don't deserve to live on God's green earth; and we'll sweep the chaparrals clear of them if we have to keep half the boys braiden lariats, and spinnin' cabalos to hang them with. Git, boys, for the river, an' string 'em, as Big Foot says, to show 'em we intend to carry this thing out, an' that we hain't forgot Will, but hurry back, there's work enough hero for all. We must move camp out'en this accursed opening."

Away rode Ben, Phil, Joe, Kit and Big Foot, at a fast lope toward the river, the prisoners bound to their horses shuddering with horror as they passed along the trail of blood and death, their eyes wandering wildly, this way and that, in a vain endeavor to avoid the ghastly sight.

But we will stop on the battle-field, and take a look at the strange sight before us.

We will take up our position at the point where the neck of the opening connects with the government road.

Before us, to our right, is the main camp of the banditti; the ground is strewn with dead Guerrillas and horses in every conceivable position, some of the robbers still holding with the grip of death, the rifle, pistol or knife. Small parties of Rangers are driving the animals—wild with the smell of blood and the presence of death—into the brush and corral. The stolen cattle have been driven out into the thickets, snorting, bellowing, and tearing at the bloody earth with horn and hoof.

Groups of Rangers are tenderly carrying their wounded comrades, upon blankets, to an open spot near our station of observation, where the doctors, Kate Luby and her son Fred, (who is attentive at his mother's side, with his saddle-bags of bandages and lint) are doing all in their power for the comfort of the sufferers, who bear the pain of their wounds with the stoicism of Indian warriors.

To our left stretches the government road, nearly blocked up in places by the dead horses and bandits; and, just disappearing from view, are the Rangers with the prisoners, taking them on their last ride to the gallows-tree.

Well and nobly have the Texan Rangers maintained their character, as the best bush and prairie fighters in the world.

Outnumbered three to one, they have almost blotted out from the face of the earth the strongest, boldest, and most murderous band of cutthroats ever congregated together upon the American continent, who have for months defied the United States, and the State of Texas in particular, by committing the most horrible murders, degrading to a fate worse than death the poor women who have been so cursed as to fall into their power, burning ranches, stealing horses and cattle by thousands, and leaving a smoking trail of desolation and ruin up and down the Rio Grande.

Where are they? Perhaps three-score of them, with their chief—who seems to bear a charmed life—are now cowering, horror-struck at the wholesale disaster and retribution that has fallen upon them, like an avalanche, in the chaparrals on the Mexican side of the Bravo.

The others lay cold and lifeless before us, their fiendish, brutal, degraded features made more so by the hand of death.

Charon has had a lively morning's work at his ferry, over the Styx.

Those who drank deep potations, and cried "Vive Cortina," last night, and but a day or two ago yelled with delight and sneered with derision as they let out the life-blood of Texans, by slow torture, are but clods of the earth, too disgusting and horrible for the hands of man to come in contact with.

Into camp dashes Col. Ford; his horse spurns the ground proudly, for he rides a fresh animal. He is here and there, giving orders to each group of his men, then approaches the point where the wounded are laying, dismounts, removes his sombrero, and salutes those before him.

"Kate Luby, doctors, gentlemen, and last, but not least in my heart, my brother soldiers—doubly dear to me, now you are suffering for defending the honor and security of the Lone Star State!

"I am happy to inform you all that I have found a good, pleasant camping spot down the river, where we will move immediately. The wagons will soon be ready to transport our poor wounded boys, and take our honored dead to a decent place for burial. The animals will be driven down later. It will be impossible to stop long here, for the hot sun will soon make the air in this opening unfit to breathe, and the buzzards and wolves now murmur at our delay. Kate Luby, will you and your son accompany me now to the new camp? The boys will move our wounded as tenderly as you could wish, for we are all one loving family, bound together by ties unknown to so-called civilized life. Adios, until we meet again, gentlemen."

Kate Luby mounted her horse, and gracefully saluted the doctors and wounded Rangers; faint cheers, and God bless you's, filled her ears as she galloped away with Col. Ford, which repaid her a thousand times for the trouble she had voluntarily put upon herself in the cause of suffering humanity.

The doctors superintended the removal of the wounded. There were hundreds of woolen blankets among the spoils captured; these were laid upon the wagon-bottoms, to form easy couches.

One wagon was detached, and lumbered along slowly behind, with the dead Rangers—many of the pards, or bunkies, of the dead, following the remains of those who had been more than brothers to them.

Silence and death reigned over the bandit camp.

The cowardly cayotes peeped from the chaparral, anticipating the horrid feast before them, and hundreds of buzzards hovered over it, turning their heads to one side, as they flew, to view the prey beneath them—their numbers being increased every moment by others of their family, from all points of the compass.

By means of an instinct which is incomprehensible to us, these birds seem to know where the food upon which they feed awaits them. Shoot a buffalo upon a level prairie, perfectly free from bush or tree, as far as eye can reach, and not a single object in the air visible to the eye; it will not be long, if you watch, before you will see specks afar off in the sky, which, as they approach nearer, you find are buzzards, and when they reach your position, their journey ends; they circle in the air awaiting the time when you shall leave the dead bison. Then their feast commences. How did they know there was a dead animal there?

CHAPTER XV. AN UNLUCKY SHOT.

But hosts may in these wilds abound,
Such as are better missed than found;
To meet with Indian marauders here
Were worse than loss of steed or deer.

* * * * *
She crouched concealed amid the brake
Near to the dark and slimy lake;
The maiden listened, as if again
She thought to catch some distant strain.
With hand up-raised, and look intent,
And eye and ear attentive bent,
And locks flung back, and lips apart,
Like monument of Grecian art.

Our heroine Rely, with Jack, and Clown, continued the journey through the hot day, following the eventful night spent at the cabin of Big Foot Wallace, and encamped in the bottom-timber of the Rio Frio.

Here they found good water and grass, and also plenty of fish. They stopped over two nights and a day, to allow themselves and animals a rest; after which, a hard day's ride brought them to the Nueces, about three miles below the deserted post of fort Ewell. The camp was not on the river, but a short distance north, on the banks of one of the chain of lakes that stretch up and down the stream.

In these small lakes were hundreds of alligators, whose slimy heads, resting upon the surface, gazed in wonder, or with a strong appetite, at our three adventurous friends.

The darting of immense alligator-gars, the wallowing of alligators and cat-fish, kept the waters of the lake in constant agitation, and very muddy; but inlets were found upon the

borders of the pool, where the waters were clear enough for use.

The horses were staked, on the rank, rich grass which surrounded the lakes, just out from the timber which bordered them.

When Jack returned, from taking the horses to grass, Rely was seated, weary and worn, on her blanket and Clown was busy preparing the evening meal. Jack looked into the frying-pan and turned up his nose, saying:

"I've chawed that dauged dried beef long enuf. I'm a-goin' fur sumthin' fresh. I don't rec'on one shot'll bring the reds down on us, an' I seen a buck below, agoin' fur water. I'll make cold meat onten him;" and Jack took his rifle and started down the lake, through the timber, followed by the voice of Clown, recommending extreme caution.

Jack proceeded down the shore of the lake, stepping upon and over the smoldering trunks of trees, and through the underbrush, for half a mile, when his eyes caught sight of the buck he was in search of, standing upon the edge of the lake, drinking. Cocking his rifle, and stealthily making his way over the difficulties in his path, and keeping his eyes on the game before him, Jack went toward the deer.

While thus, step by step, approaching the buck that still idly lapped the water, what seemed to Jack to be a log of deadwood was reached, and as he had in the same manner made his way over others in his path, he stepped upon it, with one foot. His weight had just been relieved from the foot which was on the ground, his whole weight resting upon the supposed log, when the latter shot out from under him in an instant.

Jack had his rifle ready to raise when he cleared the last obstruction in the path, his finger in the trigger-guard; as he lost his footing his finger unconsciously pressed the trigger and the gun exploded.

Jack dropped the rifle as if it had been a red-hot iron and sprung into the branches of a tree, knowing not what danger threatened him.

But, Jack was forced to blush with shame as he saw a huge alligator plunge into the lake, as frightened as badly as himself.

"Dog-gone ther cuss! He giv' a curi's chill tew my blood, an' that ornerie rifle giv' me another. Didn't kno' she was *cocked*, sculped if I did. Rec'on I'm gittin' mixed in my upper story. Whar's ther deer? Ther cuss must 'a' got a scare, tew."

Jack breathed heavily, after the hasty climb, and still sat in his perch, and as his thoughts turned from the rifle upon the ground to the buck, he glanced toward the spot where the animal had stood; to his great surprise the buck lay there kicking in the agonies of death, upon the shore. Jack's eyes opened to twice their usual size, and he commenced to think and scratch his head. He eventually concluded that it was next to impossible for his rifle, when it went off accidentally, to have taken a course toward the buck, for it was pointed upward at an angle of forty-five degrees. Jack glanced at his position where the alligator had lain asleep, and brought back in his mind about the way things stood when he lost his equilibrium, and where the muzzle of his rifle was pointed. Following up the imaginary course of the ball, he saw not far from where his calculations ended the long furrow of the bullet, where it had torn up the bark on a tree, high up from the ground. Upon Jack's discovery of this proof of his gun not having been the cause of the death of the deer, he again broke out, in soliloquy:

"I never he'd ev a buck gittin' skeered tew de'th, but, seein' ther alligator git up an' git, one way, an' me stampedin' another, might 'a' made ther cuss 'laif' hisself tew de'th," and a low chuckle of mirth convulsed Jack's frame for a moment.

Jack pulled out his tobacco, and was about to take a chew before descending from the tree to examine the buck, when he received a sudden and stunning blow upon the back of his head, which tumbled him from the tree, senseless to the earth.

A half-dozen Indians sprung from the underbrush, and bound him hand and foot.

A tall, finely-formed chief stalked proudly from the timber into the midst of his warriors, gave a glance at the thongs which bound the captive, issued a low order in the Camanche tongue to one of his braves, who departed down the shore, but soon returned with an old corn-sack, which he was about to draw over the head of Jack, when a gesture from the chief prevented him. With a motion toward the dead buck he dismissed them all, and they proceeded to dress the animal. The long shaft of an arrow projecting from the side of the deer showed plainly that poor Jack had not arrived at the correct conclusion in regard to the buck's death. It would not be much of a riddle to him when he recovered his senses and found himself prisoner.

The chief seated himself by the side of the form of Jack, loosened a gourd from his belt, and poured water upon his captive's head.

Jack groaned heavily; at length his eyes opened and fell upon the Indian before him, who was also looking at Jack with a glance of bitter hatred.

Jack knew that the least show of surprise, fear, or weakness, would go against him, and all the bravo and unconcern he could muster would be in his favor; and with the appearance of as much indifference as if he had been in the same situation a thousand times, and come out all right, he addressed the chief.

"Howde, Mister Vermilion! Yer take a danged ruff' way of makin' my 'quaintance, and tuck it when I warn't expectin' yer. Just loosen these buckstrings frum my paws. I want my terbaccy; war just a-goin' tow take a chaw when yer tryed tew bu'st my he'd an' knocked it flyin'."

At the mention of tobacco the chief's eyes brightened, and following Jack's gaze along the foot of the tree, from which he had so suddenly been knocked, the Indian on his hands and knees commenced a search for the weed he craved perhaps more than Jack himself.

He soon found the long plug of the coveted weed, eagerly tore off a huge cud with his teeth, and commenced chewing the same with evident satisfaction.

Seating himself beside Jack once more he held the tobacco near to his captive's mouth, and when Jack opened his jaws for the expected chew the chief gave him a rough blow across the face, saying:

"Whar your chief, Great Big Foot? Whar white squaw? Whar crooked fingers? Kill many my braves on San Miguel; must have scalps! Tell Creeping Panther, quick! Mo find um."

"Yer talk danged good English, fur a Curmanch. Rec'on yer must 'a' mixed with ther Washtaw Reserves; sh'u'en't wunder. As tew Big Foot, you look sharp, or he'll git his cat arter yer, what just tore yer best warriers inter shue-strings. Big Foot have got a panther what'll knock spots off'en you, an' make yer *creep* right smart, I rec'on. As tew the others ver speak of, if yer want 'em, why, find 'em, fur if yer slash me inter hash, an' fry me, I ain't agoin' tew sling a word within a hundred miles on 'em."

At the mention of Big Foot's panther the Indian gave a shudder, which, with the previous words of the chief, showed plainly to Jack that the Indian who had charge of the horses at the time of the fight at the cabin of Wallace, and who afterward escaped, had joined the party that held Jack prisoner. They must be few in numbers, and also unaware of the strength of the party Jack was with, or they would immediately have followed Jack's back trail to the camp, and captured Rely and Clown.

They evidently thought that Big Foot was with Jack, and had no idea of any whites being in the vicinity until they had discovered him crawling for the deer at the same time one of their party was about to shoot the buck.

Jack was laboring under great concern of mind in regard to Clown and Rely, as they had surely heard the report of his rifle, and would soon expect him back to camp. What if Clown should venture down the lake in search of him? What if he should give a recall yell? It would result in their death or capture. Jack was almost beside himself, thinking of the consequences of such a movement on Clown's part.

He cared not for himself; he was willing to run his chances—to undergo anything if Rely only escaped and got through safe to her brother.

The sun disappeared; the twilight deepened fast amid the timber, and the chief still sat chewing tobacco, with eyes and ears open and on the alert, watching for any movement from up the lake. Finally he turned to his followers and motioned them toward him. A few words in a low voice, in his native lingo, and Jack was securely bound to the same tree he had been knocked from, and left there—the last salutation of the chief being to squirt a stream of tobacco saliva directly into Jack's face.

"By the blood of Crockett I'll pay yer fur that, if I hav' ter foller yer tew ther Rockies, yer sneakin', cowardly, lousy cuss ev a Camanche! Dang my eyes if I ain't in a tight-fit, an' they'll git Rely now. Cuss the idea what fottedch me fur that buck. I'd better never 'a' tasted fresh meat ag'in."

But, we will leave Jack, bound to the tree, suffering great agonies of mind in regard to his fellow-travelers, and in body, from the torturing cords about his wrists and ankles.

The Indians remove the carcass of the deer a few steps down the lake to their camp, and are preparing to make an advance up in the direction from which Jack had come, to make a reconnaissance of the camp of the whites.

Did they know that but two persons occupied the camp up the lake, they would not have looked upon the undertaking so seriously; but, thinking that Big Foot, the dreaded giant, was with the party, and they numbering but eight warriors, they knew they must proceed with caution, for as Jack had before this time been missed, and so gifted a scout as Big Foot would have correctly inferred the cause of his absence, they would be expected.

Clown had just pulled the coffee-pot from off the coals to settle, when the rifle-shot of Jack broke on the air, and echoed through the timber. In spite of himself a cold chill of apprehension ran through him, and he noticed that Rely started nervously; but with a cheering voice he addressed her:

"Come, Rely, rouse up and take some supper. We'll not wait for Jack without you hanker for a venison steak. We'll have our coffee, anyway, when it tastes best. I ha'n't thrown off on dried beef myself; I like it as a stand-by, an' wish Jack had stopped here. It will make so much trouble if he brings in a buck; he'll want to cook up a bag-full to take along to-morrow, an' we ought to be asleep."

"I do wish he had not gone for the deer, Clown, for I feel very nervous to-night. It is so dark and gloomy under these trees; the water in the lake is so sluggish and black, and those horrid, slimy alligators, plunging about, all seem to cast a shadow over my thoughts, and I have a presentiment of coming danger, although I pray God that no more terrors may beset our path."

They both partook of the simple prairie meal in silence, every moment expecting to see the form of Jack burst through the brush. When they had finished, Clown stepped out, half-way between the horses and the camp-fire, and listened intently for some time, but nothing could be heard of Jack's returning footsteps.

He stole silent—his mind filled with forebodings of danger—back to Rely, who had again laid her exhausted form upon the blankets.

"See here, Rely, thar's no use in makin' any bones of it; thar's sumthin' wrong with Jack, sure."

"He wouldn't 'a' stopped only long enuff to slash off a hind quarter of that buck, an' he warn't a half mile frum here when he fired. He's had time to 'a' got here long ago, an' either the Reds has got him, or he's shot hisself, an' the last trick he ain't likely to do. We must think sharp an' quick, an' git frum here. If the Reds hav' got him, an' tha'd 'a' be'n a strong party, tha'd 'a' bo'n here afore this. Thay'll cum, anyway, bet yer life. See here, Rely, what kind o' medicines yer got to take to yer brother? I he'rd yer speak about havin' sum in yer saddle-bags. Hav' yer got any l'ud'num?"

"Yes, Clown, I have—I think a four-ounce vial; but, what do you want of it? You are not a-going to poison yourself, and leave me here alone to cope with the dangers which surround us? Do you really think Jack is captured? God protect me from the Red fiends. Let us fly, Clown, from this dreadful spot. I abhorred this place from the first time my eyes beheld it."

Clown now came up to where Rely reclined. As she ceased speaking, holding the bottle of whisky in his hand, he said:

"Now, Rely, to make things *sure*, if we are cotched by the Reds, why, we will doctor this whisky, fur they'll be sure to go for it the fust thing, when they rummage around our camp tricks."

"What an idea!" said Rely, as she passed the vial to Clown, who poured the contents into the whisky, and as it did not quite fill the bottle, he added some water, and replaced it in his saddle-bags.

"Now, Rely, please to get your tricks together. I'll go fur the horses. Yer can bet yer life Jack is bagged, an' we will be if we don't git frum here."

Clown immediately started for the animals, but soon returned to Rely, and grasped her by the arm, whispering hoarsely in her ears: "The horses are gone, and we are lost."

Clown hurried Rely's trembling form into a dense thicket of underbrush, cautioned her to silence, and, telling her to be brave, that he would soon return, he slowly glided along the ground, made his way to the opposite side of the camp, then boldly entered it. The fire had died down, so that a human form could hardly be distinguished. Clown rolled the blankets of the party about logs of deadwood, and placed them around the fire to resemble sleeping forms; there was but a chance, and that was all, that the Indians were not already observing him; but, possibly they were not; he could not say that they had returned from removing the horses, or whether they had left a spy behind to watch the camp.

When Clown had fixed things to suit him, he threw a large amount of wood upon the embers, and then, before a blaze lit up the camp, he took his rifle and crawled away toward the hiding-place of Rely, but, before he had gone twenty paces, three warriors sprung upon him, bore him to the earth, wrenching his rifle and six shooters from him, and in an instant he was bound securely, hand and foot.

The camp-fire now burst into a blaze, throwing a brilliant light around, and as his captors bore him to a tree at the camp-fire, other Indians were kicking the blankets about.

The chief pointed significantly at the three saddles, saying:

"The Big Foot chief and his cat stay at his lodge. Find the white squaw!"

Clown was bound to a tree near the fire, and the Indians scattered to hunt for Rely.

When Clown left Rely hidden in the bushes, she lost all hope, and kneeling, she prayed fervently to God to preserve herself and friends from the great troubles that seemed thickening

around them, and to lead them safely to her sick brother, and that they both might again be permitted to see the face of their dear mother.

As she finished her orisons, and her thoughts were, notwithstanding her present dangerous position, wandering to loved ones far away, the struggle of the Indians with her only remaining protector sent a thrill of agony to her heart.

She listened intently; she knew that Clown had been overpowered suddenly and unexpectedly or he would have fired his rifle.

She cowered down to the earth, and wept bitter tears to think that perhaps she had been the direct means of bringing two brave, noble men to a horrible death.

A slashing and crashing of branches toward the lake below her struck her ears; a heavy body seemed dragging along the earth toward her; it was crawling up the bank; a musky, nauseating smell filled the air; the heavy body came nearer and nearer, the smell sickened her, and the consciousness of an unlooked-for danger, in some unknown and horrible form, stagnated her blood.

It must be, it was, one of the large alligators she had seen in the lake! Oh, horror of horrors! The dreadful, disgusting monster would drag her into the dark depths of the lake, in his jaws, and none would ever know the horrible death she had died.

She tried to creep away, but her limbs seemed devoid of all motion. She heard, oh, how distinctly! the claws of the alligator tear into the bank as the monster exerted itself to gain a hold, and the ponderous form move nearer and nearer.

Rely closed her eyes, and prayed in whispers for deliverance from this most dreadful death which now threatened her.

The bushes parted, and were pressed down to the earth by the great weight of the amphibious monster; its loathsome breath fanned her cheek, and then the cold, slimy nose suddenly struck her hand.

This broke the spell which bound her. She sprung, with one wild, piercing shriek, from the bushes, and fell into the arms of an Indian brave, but she knew it not, for her sensos kindly left her at the moment, and went out into the air with that agonizing scream of horror.

The long, tedious rides to which she was not accustomed, constant watchfulness, the ride for life from the Indians, the bloody scenes at the cabin of Big Foot, would have worn out even a man, unused to such a life.

The shriek of Rely pierced not only the heart of Clown, but of poor Jack, afar off, bound to the tree, and caused him to redouble his exertions to free himself from the galling thongs.

Rely was brought into camp, a dash of cold water thrown into her face, which revived her, and showed, too plainly to the suffering maiden, her horrible surroundings.

She was bound by the waist securely to a tree, next to Clown, and but a few feet from him. From the knowledge of her inability to escape, they left her hands free.

She returned Clown's look of sorrow and deep pity, with one of utter hopelessness and despair.

Creeping Panther stood before her with folded arms, an air of triumph, majesty and command upon his features, and in the very poise of form and limb.

"When did the white squaws turn warriors? Are the pale-faces so weak that they put the women on the war-path? Creeping Panther is happy; the Rose of the Alamo is his captive; the birds told him; she be his squaw, build his fire, cook his meat, away beyond the big, dry plain."

"Creeping Panther's ears have been tickled with tales of the Rose of the Alamo; his braves see her at fort Mason; the Great Spirit has led her into the arms of Creeping Panther, and his heart grows big with gladness."

Rely, seeing that her position was one of great danger—in fact no possibility of release presenting itself to her mind, became desperate; her whole nature seemed to undergo a change, as she drew back her arm and struck the chief a violent blow in the face.

Creeping Panther swerved but slightly from the force of the blow, and a smile hovered over his repulsively painted face.

"A leaf has blown from the Rose and brushed the face of Creeping Panther; he loves the breeze that sent it."

"Keep your love-talk for the squaws of your tribe. I want neither your words nor presence; leave me; I have that to think of which tears my heart. Have you no compassion upon a woman who journeys to care for a sick brother, that you must detain and bind her and her friends to trees, like dogs? If you are such a mighty warrior, release us, and, outnumbering us as you do, we will blot you from the earth forever, murderers and torturers of innocent women and babes! You are more vile and loathsome than the slimy alligator of the dark lake below."

At this stage of the controversy between Rely and Creeping Panther, the latter's attention was drawn by deep grunts of satisfaction from his warriors, who had discovered the bottle of whisky in the saddle-bags of Clown.

In an instant his eyes brightened; he had evi-

dently as much hankering after spirits as he had shown for tobacco, and he sprang among them, took the bottle, and applied the same to his nostrils.

The inspection satisfied him, for he immediately took a long draught of the liquor, and passed it to the next brave, and so it went around the circle, as they were seated among the saddles and camp tricks.

"Now, what yer thinks o' Pud'nun, Rely?" whispered Clown. "I ain't so much of a bambooslin' fool as yer tuck me fur, am I?"

"Oh, heaven be praised, Clown! God ever bless you! Who would have thought of such a plot at such a time? We may get free yet, if they do not get maddened by the drink and butcher us."

"Tha' can't do it; tha's too much l'ud'nun; it'll knock the scalps right of 'en the'r heads, see ef it don't! I wish tew thunder I known what had becum of Jack. Yer see, they tuck him unawares or he w'u'd 'a' g'n'em fits with his shutters. I see the Creepin' Panther has got 'em buckled round him. If Big Foot's panther went fur him, I reckon he'd do sum dog-goned tall creepin', sure and sartin."

But to return to poor Jack, lashed to the tree, in the darkness of the night, the damp air, filled with the loathsome scent of alligators that were having a regular jubilee and squabble not far from him.

The pain from the buckstring-cords cutting into his flesh, and the knowledge that his friends were in great danger, all combined to make Jack the most miserable of men.

The knowledge that he could not be of any assistance to Rely and Clown in the hour of their great danger, was the worst of Jack's troubles; he could bear everything with fortitude except that.

Jack twisted and worked himself this way and that way in the endeavor to release himself from the thongs which bound his hands to the tree; he was rather fleshy, and the cords caused a swelling of the limbs, which was extremely painful. He eventually writhed about to such an extent that, with the help of the heavy dew, and dampness from the lake, he succeeded in slackening the buckstring considerably which bound his hands.

Jack was congratulating himself at even this slight change in his favor, when, to his horror, he heard several large alligators slash up out of the lake and come lumbering toward him.

This, then, was the death the Indians had intended he should die—to be torn in pieces by those loathsome things.

No, it could not be, for they would not give up such a chance for torturing a prisoner; it was because they needed every brave, or thought they did, to capture the camp above. The crashing of the huge reptiles, the snapping of the ponderous jaws, came nearer to poor Jack.

The beads of agony-sweat stood thick upon his forehead, and he had given up all hopes of an extended existence in this world when the piercing shriek of Rely rung through the woods as she sprung from the cold jaws of the alligator.

Every sinew in Jack's frame became steel. He gave a superhuman effort, a lunge forward; the cords binding his hands snapped asunder, and he fell forward, causing the ankle lashings to tear his flesh terribly; but, he felt it not; he half raised himself; his hands came in contact with pieces of petrified wood as hard as iron; he seized a piece in each hand, raised up and hurled them with great force at the alligators not twenty feet away. He took another piece, and beat at the cords which bound his ankles; he pounded them where they encircled the trunk of the tree, until they were bruised apart, and he was free. He staggered to the lake, driving the cowardly alligators before him. He threw water with his hands into his parched mouth, on his wounded ankles and wrists, and bathed his aching head, then staggered wildly through the wood toward the camp.

He had no arms to defend himself with, or assist his friends, if they were still alive.

On, on, as fast as his cramped limbs would take him, until the firelight of the camp shone through the trees. He took his course toward where the horses had been left; he knew that a point near this commanded a view of the camp.

He gained the open spot; a narrow cut through the trees showed him a sight that gave him hope—Clown and Rely alive, but bound to trees.

Jack scouted up toward them to see how he could be of assistance; he saw the Indians were drinking, but knew that there was not whisky enough to get two of them drunk. The satisfied looks of Rely and Clown puzzled him.

He crawled nearer, keeping the trunk of a tree with bushes around it, between himself and camp. There leaned the rifles of the party; he must secure them. What did the Indians mean by having no guard out? He could not understand why things were so loose.

Jack succeeded in getting the rifles, and a knife hanging to one of them. Not even

Clown or Rely had noticed him, so intent were they watching the Indians.

Jack made his way, noiselessly, on through the bushes, behind the trees to which Rely and Clown were bound; he stood close behind Clown and laid his warm hand on his pard's, whispering:

"Keep still; show no sign, an' be re'dy fur biz."

Clown whispered to Rely in a significant manner.

"Jack is hunk; don't be narvous; clear trail ahead!"

"Clown's cords parted above, and below; the cold barrel of his rifle was left in his palm, but he remained in the same position.

Rely was soon freed of her thongs, and a working of fingers and a changing of weight, from one limb to another, soon brought back circulation, clogged by the cords.

The whisky and laudanum had a strange effect upon the Indians. There had been but one good stiff horn to each, but, still they sat there, feeling no inclination to rise from the sitting posture which they had occupied since the chief had joined them.

They seemed to realize that something was wrong, and gazed at each other in blank dismay. All at once a feeling seemed to come over them that they must do something, and in a very awkward manner, they scrambled to their feet, and stood in a wavering way, looking at their captives. They seemed to realize that the whites were the cause of, they knew not what, but they had a suspicion that some horrible death awaited them, which they would be unable to combat against; their hands went tremblingly to the knives in their belts; murder glared plainly from their eyes.

It was evident that Creeping Panther had an idea of saving the life of Rely from the vengeance of his braves, for he made a weak bound toward her, knife in hand, and half turned to hurl them back, as the report of Jack's rifle broke on the night air, and the chief fell a corpse, in his tracks. In an instant after, the rifles of Rely and Clown also sent their messengers of death. Jack bounded to the side of the dead chief, regained his revolvers, and, right and left, sent the balls into the bewildered Indians, until all lay weltering in gore.

The hands of our three wandering friends clasped over the dead, and their uncovered heads turned reverently toward heaven, as Rely, in sweet, soft tones, muttered her prayer: "We thank thee, oh God, for answering the prayers of a poor, weak mortal, surrounded by danger and blood, and delivering us from the merciless savages who had a thousand deaths in store for us."

"Amen!" rung in hoarse accents from Clown and Jack.

The Indians were dragged down to the shore of the lake, Rely retiring to the far side of the camp to get beyond the ghastly sight. Her thoughts flew alternately to her mother in San Antonio, and her brother on the Rio Grande.

She knew it would kill her mother to know she was braving so many and horrible dangers; and she knew her brother would rather die than have her encounter them, for his sake; but she had gone too far, now, to turn back; she hoped the dangers were passed, and was thankful, oh, so thankful, that she had escaped death or captivity, for both had stared her in the face.

As she looked back at the dangers of the last few days, she thought that she could not bear them over again and live, so greatly had her mind been tortured by anxiety for the two brave friends who accompanied her, she knowing the misery that would follow the death of either.

Rely was called back to camp, by Jack, who, although suffering greatly, seemed quite cheerful.

"Come, Rely; we've got the varmints outen yer sight, an' now I re'con we'll see to things. Have yer got any kind o' salve, about yer med'cine, to rub on whar the reds tied me so tarnation tight? My meat's torn up, sum consider'ble."

"Oh, yes, Jack; and I am so happy I can do something for you, for my conscience troubles me for all the trials and dangers I have brought upon you."

"Oh, shucks, now, Rely; I told yer often, that kind o' talk ware su'table to sling at them what don't care enuff fur their friends to save 'em. I want no thanks fur what I duz fur pure friendship's sake, an' no pay, either, without, may be, a pleasant word, or smile, which you always hav' for us. Them goes further with me an' Clown than do'bloons. Ha, Clown, ain't that so?"

"Yer just right there, Jack. Why, Rely, it duz me more good to sarcumvent them red-painted sculpers than anything else I knows on. If it warn't fur bein' so pesky afraid they'd git off with you, I wouldn't mind such a scrape every day; but I can just tell yer both we're in the hottest place that is in ther State. I he'd them Reds blowin' in thar lingo, and I understand sum; I ought tew, I've had doin's enuff with 'em. Ther's bin a big war-party fifty miles up the river; they split up ther, and cum down in different trails, intendin' tew cum to

gether ag'in, with plunder an' prisoners. Now we hav' run ag'in two squads of them; the others aint fur off; two have gone toward Mexico, an' these Reds here were waitin' fur a crowd of twenty-five warriors to meet 'em right here on this like; so the quicker we git up an' dust outer this the better, an' tew tew one we run ag'in' sum of them what's gone for Mexican plunder."

"Great Father protect us! What shall we do? If we return toward San Antonio would we be liable to meet any of these fiends, Clown?" inquired Rely.

"Wall, yes; rec'on we'd stand as poor a show either way, but we've got good mustangs—that is, when we find 'em, an' that must be soon—an' can run for it. We've got to be more keefur, and not be so danged particular about eatin' dried-beef. Jack, do yer hear?"

"Thinks I duz; I ain't deif yet, but I'm as ravenous fur grub that dried-beef or anything'll go good now, you bet. Thank yer, Rely; you've done my ankles an' wrists up so neat an' soft, I can't feel much pain; I'll only take a bite, just tew keep my stun-jacket frum forgitin' its biz, an' we'll go fur the nags; the Reds didn't take 'em fur, an' ther camp are just below whar tha tied me up fur alligator bait. Rec'on I'd 'a' been chawed up finer nor Ed. Braiden's hash afore this if you hadn't gi'n that yell, Rely. I thought the Reds ware torturin' yer, an' bu'st my harness right thar, took ther bit atween my teeth, an' cum pony-express spced."

"I'm dog-goned glad," said Clown, "that everything has cum out so squar', but, as I remarked afore, we've got to h'ist ourselves outer this a flyin'. Rely, you don't care tow stop here alone, I rec'on, so let's all go fur the nags; they can't be fur from whar we left 'em. We must change our course, an' put up the river a right smart distance, to get above the Rio Grande trail, so as not tew meet any of the Reds comin' in frum that-a-way."

Rely and Clown proceeded to look for the horses, Jack following with his hands full of dried-beef and corn-pone, and his teeth doing extra duty.

About fifty feet from where the horses had been left they were found, where the Indians had removed them, and glad were our friends to once more mount their well-tried prairie friends that had served them so faithfully.

Every thing belonging to them was collected by building a bright fire, and they started on in the darkness up the Nueces river, to find a place secure from observation, and away from the trail, so they could take the repose and rest so much needed by them after the hardship and excitement they had passed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEW TRAIL.

When tales are told of blood and fear,
That boys and women shrink to hear,
From point to point I frankly tell
The deed of death as it befell.

* * * * *
By heaven his horse's footstool shakes!
Beneath their tott'ring bulk it bends—
It sways—it loosens—it descends!
And downward holds its headlong way,
Crashing and throwing up the spray.
Loud thunders shake the echoing dell!
Fell it alone? Alone it fell,
Just on the very verge of fate,
The "Daring" Texan's falling weight;
He trusted to his mustang's bounds,
And on firm bank unharmed he stands!

If required but a moment to adjust the lariats around the necks of the two bandits, who had attempted the assassination of Kate Luby when she was proceeding up the river on her errand of mercy.

The ends of the lariats were drawn over the limbs of the musquit trees, which projected over the bank, and beneath which were the rolling waters of the river, one hundred feet below.

Kit Carson addressed them in Spanish, telling them they had five minutes to prepare themselves for the other world, and take a farewell look at their country over the water.

The wretched, degraded men, who hesitated at no crime, however horrible, now trembled, muttered their prayers, and then stood gazing over the Rio Grande, upon the shores which they were destined never more to tread.

Seeing no mercy in the looks of their captors, they suddenly assumed a bravado, which the quivering of their lips gave the lie to, and yelled: "Vive Cortina!" "Carracas Americanas!" "Carracas GRINGOES!" The last word was uttered with a genuine hatred and look of contempt which, in spite of themselves, the Rangers could not help but admire, especially when considered with the true loyalty they manifested for their chief, even to the death.

The lariats slackened, as if the Rangers hesitated in their determination to execute the bandits.

"Remember the whirlpool at fort Brown, boys!" said Ben Thompson.

As "Fighting Ben" mentioned this incident, which he had described to them previously, the lariats again tightened, and the bandits were drawn to the verge of the awful abyss, their eyes bulging out in terror.

"Remember our oath over the murdered child, on the Resaca de la Palma," said Kit.

No sooner had the words left his lips than the lariats were suddenly jerked, and the two bandits swung out, dangling and twisting, over the waters of their Rio Bravo, one upon each side of the opening torn by Wild Will and his horse, as they dashed through and down to destruction.

The lariats' ends were made fast to the trunks of the trees, and the cutthroats were left, swaying in plain view of their countrymen, from the opposite shore.

"Hang there! vile varlets!" said Reckless Joe, "until the damps and dews and wandering winds shall rot and twist the cords which now sustain and hold you up, as an example to those who dare invade our State!"

"Hang, I say, and idly dangle, high above the mad waters, which shall soon be contaminated with thy loathsome carcasses!"

"Hang higher than Haman, thou base, degraded sons of a semi-monthly, revolutionized, conglomerated, amalgamated, bastard republic!"

"Hang!"

"Hold! Enough, Joe! They've done kick-ing. Give 'em a rest," interrupted Ben Thompson.

Big Foot heaved a heavy sigh as he remarked:

"Yes, Ben, they've danced their last fandang, on nothin', without ary music; they've cut the last throat, stuk' the'r last man in ther back, an' burt the'r last ranch. I'm dog-goned sorry we hav'n't more on 'em, fur them two looks lon'sum; ther's room enuf fur more on 'em all along ther river, an' we'd oughter stretch 'em clean down tew fort Brown. Joe, whar in thunder ware yer edicated? Yer sling ther dang'est, biggest words I ever knowed any one else tew let loose. Can yer mako any thing out'en Joe's lingo, Kit?"

"Oh, yes; Joe was only expressing his contempt for the Mexicans in general, and the bandits of Cortina in particular."

"I rec'on so, by ther way he looked an' acted. Joe, I'll be dog-goned if I won't give yer ther best saddle-nag I've got on my ranch, if you'll sit down sum day an' larn me them dangled long words, so when I'm b'ilin' mad, an' can't find no Greaser tew shoot, I can sling 'em acrost the'r Bravo at 'em. I s'peet, tho', I'll hav' tew ile my jaws right smartly afore I can spit 'em out. What yer thinkin' on, Kit? 'Pears like yer see a petticoat over thar, by ther way yer gaze?"

"I see no sign of any female presence; my thoughts run in other channels. I'm thinking of how we have cleaned out the 'Chaparral Fox' to-day, and what benefit it will be to Texas. Cortina is far from being whipped. This band of cutthroats is broken up, but a thousand more of his men stand ready to serve him at any time against the hated Gringoes. In less than a month, mark my words, Cortina will again disgrace the soil of Texas by his presence. He is here, there, and everywhere; his spies will keep him informed as to our movements, and he will dash in when and where he is least expected."

"This has been a disastrous fight to him, but it takes no capital or commissary to start an army such as his command is composed of."

"The Rangers from the north-west have but recently returned from long and weary trails, which took them to the head-waters of the Canadian river. In three months the Camanches, Apaches, Kioways, Kickapoos, and who knows what other red-devils, will again be at their bloody work."

"The prairies and chaparrals of Texas have been bathed in gore, and the end is not yet; and none can say when it will be. Certainly not until the United States government cuts off six thousand miles of red-tape, which the secretary of war persists in hauling, hand over hand, back and forth, while the country is being devastated by hordes of Mexican outlaws, and war-parties of blood-thirsty Indians—not until the said secretary orders a full company of cavalry to take the place of the corporal's guard of infantry, in nearly every frontier fort."

"To the devil with Uncle Samuel," growled Big Foot; "we can fight our own battles, as this day stands proof. Thar hain't been as many yaller-bellies clawed grass afore, in one day, since old Taylor giv' em chain shot out'en his big guns, an'

"Charley May mowed his way.
Frum Palo Alto tew Monteray,
An' our Jack Hays did cut an' blaze
Clean thru tew ther City of ther Montezum-aazz."

"Hear! hear!" Reckless Joe shouted.

"By all that's truthful in Denmark, Big Foot, thou art a poet."

"Why hast thou wasted talents, on the desert air? Why don't yer go it?"

"Sling out yer slang what smacks of plains and woods;

"That's just ther style, now, what takes with city bloods;

"Let 'em know you know in yer own lingo."

"That yer can blow, right smart, with the help of Joe—

"That is, when I learn you them high-fa-lutin, rambunctious, ramifications of exalted English."

The laugh that followed Joe's rhyming at-

tempts was suddenly brought to a stop by the clatter of hoofs, up the river, and an exclama-tion of surprise from Fighting Ben.

"May I never see a square deal again, if that isn't my brother, Billie!"

All of the Rangers, who were just ready to mount and rejoin the main command, now turned their eyes and attention up the stream toward the fast-approaching horseman, whom all recognized as Daring Bill, the brother of Fighting Ben."

Dashing down toward them, at times causing his horse to bound so near the bank of the river that, as the hoofs of the animal spurned the turf, for the next spring, the earth upon which the horse stood an instant before would be detached and fall with a great splash down into the stream—the bank above projecting over the water-line below.

Riding with as wild, careless, and graceful a manner as a Camanche brave, this young man, showing, by his dare-devil style, by his near approach to the edge of the dangerous bank, by the yell that burst from his lips as he saw the Rangers, a perfect type of the young Texan, who fears nothing, and glories in braving danger, no matter of what form or from what quarter.

Daring Bill was fair, and pretty as a young girl, with rosy cheeks, long, black hair, sharp, piercing eyes, that would be sure to detect danger in time to act.

Billy Thompson was the dandy Ranger of the Rio Grande. He was always dressed in such nobby style, and no amount of scouting could set him back any, or prevent his looking neat and tidy. He was just as eager for a fight as his brother Ben, and you often hear speak of the fighting Thompsons, no matter in what portion of the State of Texas you may be travel-ing.

A costly sombrero, trimmed with gold, a golden-snake for a band, sat jauntily upon Bill's well-shaped head; a fancy embroidered jacket of buckskin and leggings of the same, to match, glittering with the buttons which ran thickly down the seams, amid the long fringes; top-boots, silver spurs, and red silk sash completed his make-up in the way of clothing; while the ivory butts of two large-sized Colt's revolvers projected from the ornamental scabbards, and a huge bowie-knife was stuck in the left side of his belt. A Sharpe's carbine hung from his saddle-horn, and the bridle and saddle of his horse were one mass of exquisite stamped leather, and silver filagree-work.

The horse seemed created for the rider—a beautiful mustang, black as midnight, and graceful as a prairie fawn.

Take them, rider and horse together, they were as fine a sight as one would wish to see, as they came dashing down the banks of the Rio Grande, and into the midst of our Ranger friends.

Bill Thompson's hands were extended, right and left, to all, as he said:

"Howde, pard's? Is the big game over? Am I too late to take a hand? Howde, Ben? Shake, old boy!"

"Yer a little late, fur this deal, Bill; thar are the last keerds what was slung out," said Big Foot, pointing toward the swaying forms of the executed bandits. "Yer don't of'en get a chance ter bet on a dead thing, Bill, an' I giv' yer one now. I'll plank a slug that them lariats 'll hold 'em fur a week, afore they ware off an' drop 'em in ther drink—barrin' out a fust-class norther."

"Take the bet! Hold stakes, Joe. Some of us will manage to scout this way about that time. Have you made a clean sweep of their camp, boys?"

"Thar ain't enuff left, Bill, tew start a one-hoss-blanket game; but, what's the news up-river?" demanded Big Foot.

The Rangers were all mounted, surrounding Daring Bill, as eager to hear news as Big Foot was, for they saw that something of importance had happened up the Rio Grande, or Bill would not have ridden so desperately hard, as the condition of himself and horse indicated.

"Big times, up the creek, boys; and if you can be spared, you're wanted, bad. A war-party of about sixty Camanches have sacked the town of Guerrero, on the Mexican side, and cleaned out Corralitas, on our side. They are now encamped above Santa Juanita. They have got John G. Moore and Clay Wells prisoners. Rec'on that interests you, Joe. They have also captured a whole capoodle of pretty Mexican girls, which better be dead than go to the life they are destined for, if we do not rescue them. I had a hard run through them—caused a few to sing their death-songs—and come on for help."

"You say that John Moore and Clay Wells are prisoners, Bill; how's that?" Joe asked.

"Well, Clay was in Corralitas, sick. John had to leave him behind, when he went to Monterey for stock; but, John has lost everything, and without we get men enough to recapture the spoils and prisoners, soon, before they get far up country, ten to one, they don't torture the whites to death."

"By the blood o' Crockett, Joe," said Big Foot, "I forgot tew tell yer, yer gall, Mis-

Wells—or Rely, as Clown and Jack Hedges calls her—ware run intew my ranch on the San Miguel, by ther reds, afore I cum down. We had a hot time on it, fur a while, but cleaned 'em out at last, with the help o' my panther-cat. Tha left the same mornin' I did, for Corralitas, tew see her brother, Clay, who she had he'd war sick. She told me tew sling a word tew you, Joe, an' have yer scout up the river toward that-a-way; but I forgut it till now. Rec'on the reds will gobble up her party, tew."

"What in the name of heaven is coming next?" said Reckless Joe. "I can hardly believe that so much trouble should be heaped upon my shoulders, at one time. It does not seem possible. Excuse me, gentlemen; I cannot doubt your words; but for God's sake let us hasten to Old Rip and get relieved from duty here, if possible. There is enough of the boys who could be spared, now, to cut the reds to pieces. Come on, boys! Time is more precious than gold. Kit, Big Foot, Ben, Bill, Phil—you all are in with me on this trail, are you not?"

"Yes, Joe! You bet. Every time!" came from his fellow Rangers, as all spurred on after Joe, whose countenance showed a terrible anxiety.

They left the scene of the execution and galloped back to the battle-field; thence on the trail of the Rangers to the opening, further south, that had been chosen for the new camp and station.

The Rangers killed in the battle had just been consigned to their last home, in mother earth. The wounded were doing well, under the kind care and attention of Kate Luby. A scout from San Antonio had arrived, bringing dispatches to Col. Ford, from Gov. Houston, just previous to the arrival of Joe and his party from the scene of execution, to the effect that, as soon as a decisive battle had been fought, and the bandits driven to their own side of the Rio Grande, such a number of the Rangers, as the colonel in his judgment could spare, should be allowed one month's leave of absence, as many of them had but just returned from the Indian war, when they volunteered in the Rio Grande service, and had not been given time to see their families.

It was just as Col. Ford had finished perusing these dispatches, Joe and his comrades rode up to Old Rip Ford, and Kit, as spokesman of the squad, addressed the colonel:

"Colonel Ford, we, Rangers of the Rio Grande, under your orders, give you greeting, and wish to say that we have, to the best of our ability, served the State in breaking up the horde of bandits, commanded by the Scourge of the Bravo, and that we hold you, our colonel, as does every citizen of the Lone Star State, in the highest esteem. We are before you this night to ask a favor, which we think you cannot refuse to grant.

"Reckless Joe, our brother Ranger, is in great trouble. One he loves better than his life is in immediate danger, and two of his friends are captives to a war-party of Indians, who are encamped above Santa Juanita.

"They have a large amount of stock, stolen from both sides of the river, and also female prisoners, who, although they are Mexicans, demand at our hands immediate release, for no American can say but what he was always kindly and well-treated by the señoritas, and señoritas of our so-called sister Republic.

"We would ask you to allow us to call for volunteers enough from among our friends here, to make twenty-five fighting men, to start at day-break, after the red devils to overtake them before they have an opportunity of ill-treating or torturing the prisoners.

"Our fellow-Ranger, Daring Bill, who has been up the river on duty, and has just come down with the news, will give you the particulars when he has had a rest, and broken his long fast."

Col. Ford glanced admiringly around the circle of his favorite scouts, and then answered:

"Gentlemen, Rangers, defenders of the frontiers of our Lone Star State! It makes me proud to look upon your eager faces—you, who have just passed through one of the hardest and most bloody day's service you will perhaps ever be called upon to undergo, but now are ready for a long trail, with another big fight on the end of it. I have the authority in my hands, from Governor Houston, to give you leave of absence for thirty days, but, I now order you to proceed immediately, calling for enough volunteers to make up the number twenty-five, and more if you wish, and do your best to catch these daring devils, and don't let a single red cuss get away with his scalp. Dispose of the plunder as usual, equally among yourselves, except that which you can return to the original owners, and send the Mexican women back to their homes safely, under escort, allowing them as many animals as they wish from the number captured on the Mexican side of the river. I need not tell you to treat them kindly, I know you will. When you have done your work, and swept from the earth these red imps of Satan, your furlough commences, and you can all go to San Antonio. I shall point my trail that way myself, inside of three weeks."

"I shall station the three companies, in

squads, down the river, so they can easily and quickly get together, in case Cortina, with any large force, crosses the river.

"It will take some time afore the danged chaparral fox can get a crowd together, and then we will be ready for him, boys, and give him all he can stand ag'in."

"Joe Booth, take charge of one-half of this scouting party, and Kit Carson, Jr., you take the others. You've got an open, plain trail ahead, an' see if yer do as well at the end on't, as yer did this mornin'. I hope I shall have the pleasure of shakin' yer fists, all on yer, in ther Alamo city."

As soon as Col. Ford had ceased speaking, the Rangers burst out in three rousing cheers, and ended off with the Texas yell.

As the loud yells of the Rangers ceased, Kate Luby stepped from under the bower of branches which sheltered the wounded, and stood wondering at the commotion.

The sight of a lovely woman, standing in the light of the camp-fire, which gave an additional charm and cast a halo about her form that made her look angelic.

The sight of this woman, who they all knew was watching over and ministering to the comfort of their wounded comrades, sent an electric thrill through the whole Ranger force, and the chaparrals rang again with wild, heartfelt cheers for Kate Luby! the Queen of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XVII.

STRIKE TILL THE LAST ARMED FOE EXPIRES.

I heard the lance's shivering crash
As when the whirlwind rends the ash;
And through the wood the rifles rang
Like to a hundred anvils' clang.
* * * * *

At once there rose so wild a yell
Within that dark and narrow dell,
As all the fiends from heaven that fell
Had pealed the banner cry of hell.
* * * * *

What groans shall far-off valley fill!
What shrieks of grief shall rend the hill!
What tears of burning rage fall fast,
When moans thy tribe her battles lost.
* * * * *

When lovers meet in danger's hour
'Tis like a sun-glimpse through a shower.

OUR next scene opens fifty miles above fort Ewell, on the Nueces river, in a horse-shoe bend of the stream, of about five acres in extent—the most of which is an opening covered with tall, rich grass and bordered by large pecan trees. It is as wild and secluded a spot as there is on the continent, and unfrequented, except by occasional herds of mustangs, who canter down to drink from the prairies beyond.

But, the time to which I now allude is one week after we left our Ranger friends on the Rio Grande, and Clown, Jack and Miss Wells, or Rely, on the Nueces river, seeking a resting-place after their rough experiences from the band of Creeping Panther.

This opening and bend of the river were now occupied by a large war-party of Comanches, just preparing to return to their distant villages on the borders of the Llano Estacado.

The Indians had been more than usually successful in capturing plunder and prisoners, and were also well informed as to the Rangers being engaged on the Rio Grande in fighting Cortina, and felt themselves perfectly secure from molestation. Hundreds of horses and mules filled the opening, just driven in from the prairies for the night.

The camp-fires burning brightly on the border of the opening beneath the trees, showed plainly how secure the Indians felt themselves to be.

Before we enter and inspect the Indian camp, let us glance through the dark shades of the pecan trees which border the river to the east and west of the camp of the red-skins.

To the east, some two hundred yards from the fires of the Indians, and directly under the bank of the river, effectually concealed by the thick foliage and deepening twilight, are a dozen Rangers, seated on their horses, ready to charge into the midst of their hated foes.

Every thing has been considered in regard to approaching and attacking the Indians before the Rangers had arrived near them, by men well used to prairie warfare. They know if they charge into the camp the Indians will immediately murder the prisoners in cold blood; hence the silent movements and division of the Rangers.

The deadly Colt's revolvers are firmly held in the right hands, the bridle-rein in the left, and every sense is on the alert and ready to act.

Kit Carson, Jr., whose sharp roving eyes seem to pierce the foliage and dark shadows, bends forward as he listens for the expected signal from Reckless Joe on the opposite side of the Indian encampment.

Behind, and near to Kit is his shadow, Mike O'Keefe, who holds, with a firm grip, a cavalry saber which he has traded for at the fort on the Rio Grande. His face shows great eagerness, and his eyes try to pierce the obstructions to his view, so he can see what kind of "devils" he has to contend with now, as he has never seen an Indian.

Around the western curve of the horse-shoe-bend, creeping silently as snakes beneath the under-brush, are the rest of the Rangers under "Reckless Joe," who is most interested in the welfare of the prisoners held by the Comanches. They have left their horses behind, secreted in a thicket.

Among these Texans who are stealing so slow and silent toward the point of the Indian camp where the prisoners are bound, are some of the most noted scouts and Rangers of the southwest—Big Foot Wallace, Tom Clark, Jack Ransom, Phil Cole, Jim Bearfield, Fighting Ben and his brother Daring Bill—all eager to do all in their power to rescue the affianced wife of Reckless Joe and the other prisoners from horrible protracted deaths by torture, and the females from a degrading slavery, ten thousand times worse than death.

At intervals they stop, and lay silent and prone upon the earth, while Big Foot steals on some careless sentinel, and with his right hand grasping the Indian's neck with an iron grip, the left drives his bowie to the hilt in the heart of the red-skin, and then they move on again.

No Indian has a chance to yell, or create a commotion after the Giant of the Border once gets his hands upon him.

Let us now enter the Indian camp.

We pass through groups of savages—their features rendered more hideous than nature formed them by the war-paint which besmears them, in some instances down to the waist belt.

They are engaged in cooking fish and mule-steaks before the coals.

You hear no noise or confusion; it would not seem to you possible that so many humans could be congregated together and keep so silent. An occasional guttural grunt, now and then a monosyllable in the Comanche tongue, the neigh of a horse or squeal of a mule, is all that breaks the stillness.

We pass on through the camp; we come to a fire where several chiefs are seated, smoking their pipes. The brilliant-hued feathers twined in their long hair show their rank, but we merely give them a glance, as something attracts our eyes in their rear which interests us more than all this savage display.

Within the border of light, thrown out by the fire, we observe that a captive is bound to each tree; and among them we recognize our friends Rely, Jack, and Clown, who are again in the hands of the enemy; and the pale, emaciated youth, and fine-formed, noble-looking man, bound near them, we know must be Rely's brother, Clay, and her brother-in-law, John G. Moore.

A deathly pallor and despairing look is on the face of Rely as she gazes on the form of her brother, who seems more dead than alive.

Jack and Clown show signs of great suffering, but still it is plain to be seen that were they free, with arms in their hands, they would do some damage yet to those they look upon with such intense hatred.

On each side of the whites are several young Mexican girls, their heads hanging down, veiled by their long, luxuriant hair, which falls below their waists.

We stand horror-struck to realize that our friends we have felt such an interest in, and who have had so many dangers beset their path, are again in the power of the red torturers of the plains; but, as we contemplate their wasted and worn features and frames, a groan of agony strikes our ears from toward the fire.

From whence comes that heavy groan, which speaks plainly of unbearable, excruciating pain, and sends a thrill of horror through the heart of the hearer?

It comes from near the fire of the chiefs. We see no prisoner bound near them, and wonder from whence comes the groan.

It comes again, and guides our eyes above the heads of the chiefs, who we now notice are themselves looking upward, an expression of gratified hatred, revenge and brutality stamped upon their faces.

Our eyes turn up to the foliage above the heads of the Indians, and, oh horror of horrors! what a sight meets our view!

Two saplings about twenty feet apart have been trimmed of their branches, the tops bent over by the combined strength of several warriors, and a human—a white man—a Texan—is suspended between them by the wrists, the bent saplings drawing so strongly apart from each other that the arms of the sufferer are drawn straight and seem tearing from the body.

We see the man being so tortured is a strong, hardy ranchero, and wonder, knowing the Indian custom of treating prisoners, that he is not reserved until they arrive at their villages, but the bullet mark in the thigh, from whence issues a stream of blood, and the swinging of the limb, show the man has been shot, and has a broken leg—and that is the reason they are torturing him on the trail, as they can convey him no further.

They are not satisfied with the awful agony he is suffering with his wound, and torture worse than crucifixion, for one of the braves near the fire snatches a mass of fat meat, hissing from the embers, and hurls it directly upon the bare breast of the poor, suffering prisoner.

His form writhes, his flesh becomes a more gaudy hue, and the blood bursts forth afresh from the wound in the leg; his strength and life are fast leaving him; they can get but a low, deep moan from his lips; brands of fire are held to the bottoms of his bare feet, but he has not the strength to draw them up to avoid the dreaded torture; his eye-balls roll up under the lids; his teeth are clenched and grinding in agony. Another brave, knife in hand, reaches up and—we can write no more.

A sudden spasm follows this fiendish act; a drawing together of the limbs and body, a deep groan of mortal agony; then limbs and muscles relax; the head falls forward, and we know, and thank God, the ranchero is out of his misery.

All this is in plain view of the other prisoners, to give them a foretaste of their own fate.

The last groan of the tortured Texan was echoed by those bound to the trees, which so maddened one of the chiefs that he sprung toward them with flashing eyes. He stopped opposite Clown, gathered a lock of the captive's hair, twisted it around his fingers and jerked it by the roots from the scalp, tearing the same badly, and causing the blood to flow in streams down his face and neck, but not a murmur came from the set teeth. The Indian passes to Jack, who knows this is no time to talk or show feeling. A stunning blow upon the head of Jack rendering him senseless, and the chief stalks on to the pale, sick Clay Wells, whose head is drooped with weakness. The Indian knows the feeble boy will never live to reach the distant villages of his tribe to serve for a scene of torture, and cares not how soon he dies. His war-club is raised in the air, and descends upon the head of poor Clay; the blow is partly broken by the end of the war-club coming in contact with the tree, but it is sufficiently severe to open the scalp, bare the skull, and send spurts of blood over the other prisoners.

John Moore writhes and twists with his bonds in vain, to free himself and save the boy from death.

The war-club of the chief had no sooner cloven in the air, than Rely gave a piercing scream, that echoed and re-echoed through the now dark woods, and caused Kit Carson and his men, so impatiently awaiting the signal, to writhe in their saddles, and Kit could hardly restrain the Rangers from immediately charging into the Indian camp.

Was Rely a witch, that her voice could conjure up from earth, and bush, and from behind the scraggy trunks of trees, human forms, clad in the buck-skin of the loved Ranger corps?

One, oh so loved, so familiar to her eyes, darted past her; his rifle-barrel glanced in the fire-light as it swung with terrible force, and crashed the skull of the Indian chief who had struck her brother Clay; the next moment her bands were cut, and she was encircled by the left arm of Reckless Joe, while his right held his trusty Colt, and from his lips rung the wild Texas yell, a signal to his friends awaiting it so impatiently in the wood; the other side of the Indian camp.

Other hands were at work while Joe attended to his loved Martha.

Knives glanced and flashed around the trees; prisoners fell prone to the earth as their bonds were cut, being unable to stand from being so long cramped in one position.

Big Foot slashed the bonds of John Moore, and put a pistol in his hands, saying:

"Rub yer j'nts, man, an' pitch in; this are a free fight, an' no favors asked."

In less time than it takes to write it, the Rangers are pressing on the Indians, hand to hand, the revolvers dropping the latter thick and fast, the former barring the way so the reds could not reach their prisoners, among whom they had fired a volley of arrows at the first alarm.

Now came the crisis. The Rangers on foot were hard pressed, five to one, and being backed again toward the prisoners. John Moore, Clown and Jack, although the latter was wounded, sprung into the fight as soon as they could use their limbs, with wild yells. Big Foot, Tom, Bill, Ben, Jim, Joe, and all, were fighting like demons, but hardly able to hold their ground against such odds, when a sight burst on their eyes that gave them hope, and put double strength into their arms.

On, like an avalanche; came the mounted Rangers on the Indians' rear, driving them into one iningled mass, Kit riding over them and crushing them to the earth beneath his horse's heels, a six-shooter in each hand, uttering wilder yells than any brave on the field, and urging on his boys, who, in the same style, left death at every bound of their horses.

Mike, at Kit's side, with his wild "Hurroo, for Texas! an' ould Erin go bragh! down wid the red devils!" his saber glittering, cutting the air, and slashing all about and around him, dripping with gore, and causing as much fear and shrinking by his long knife and wild aspect, as any man in the fight—in fact, performing prodigies of valor, and winning for himself, from that day, the name of "Slashing Mike."

The animals in the opening were stampeded by Kit, at the start, to prevent the escape of the Indians.

The hottest of the fight was near the prisoners, where the Indians, back to back, fought those mounted on one side, and those on foot by the prisoners on the other.

Every man among the Rangers was a host in himself, and the carnage was fearful.

It was a scene never to be forgotten by those who were present. The thunder of thousands of hoofs, as the Indian horses were stampeded, the sharp reports and volleys of the revolvers, the zip of bullets, whiz of arrows and lances, humming of tomahawks, whoops, howls, dying and victorious yells, the shrill scream of wounded and maddened mustangs, and death-chants of the dying braves; the smoke of battle and taint of blood upon the air—all combined to make up a horrible confusion, from which the Rangers emerged with the prisoners, and collected together near the river-bank, some eighty yards from the main camp-fire of the chiefs!

Big Foot stalked up and down, panting with exertion, his clothing cut, torn and bloody, as were all who had been dismounted.

Joe, Martha Wells and John Moore were bending over the still senseless form of Clay, Rely weeping bitter tears of anguish at the sight of the death-like countenance of her brother, but giving a smile of love through her tears, as Joe would offer her words of encouragement.

A short distance from Joe was a strange sight for such a time and place. Kit Carson, Jr., sat upon a limb of deadwood with a dozen beautiful señoritas reclining upon the ground at his feet, all displaying in their faces pleasure and admiration, as they gazed at and listened to their mother tongue, as it dropped in words of pleasant flattery and encouragement from the lips of the daring, dashing American they had seen mowing his way through the red demons toward them. It was very evident to an observer that any one of them would have been overjoyed at being captured by such an enemy as Kit, and that one in particular had made up her mind to stick by his side and claim his protection rather than return to Mexico.

It was during Kit's conversation with the señoritas that Mike came toward him, having made a tour of the battlefield. He was cleaning the blood from his saber with a wisp of grass, as he neared the group, but his eyes only saw Kit.

"Arrah, spake to yer poor Mike, Misther Kit; only wun word fur the tinder marcy o' God, to let me know I'm still in Texas, an' not in the infarnal rag'ons, as things around betokens."

"Do you call *this* an infernal sight? I call it heavenly, Mike, for the angels are not wanting."

Mike's eyes wandered about the circle of Mexican girls, who were smiling, as they whispered to each other, that Mike was "un Irlandesa y un Cristiano," (an Irishman and a Christian.)

Mike's sombrero came off instanter, as he bowed and scraped before the laughing girls, who, but an hour before, were prisoners with a fearful life before them; but I picture them just as they are, and truth is stranger than fiction. You can see a Mexican woman one moment a raging tigress, the next as loving as a cooing dove.

With a smile covering his face, like the sunshine on the side of a barn, Mike shook the profered hands of the beautiful captives, but, as he was engaged in this very pleasant pastime, he was called by Big Foot, to help drive in the stampeded stock.

The next morning after the fight all started down the river, after burying the tortured ranchero and two Rangers who were killed. It was found that but few of the Indians escaped. The wounded were taken by slow, short marches to fort Ewell. Here a wagon was found ready to convey them to San Antonio, and all hands proceeded toward the Alamo City, but with slow progress, on account of the sick, and those injured in the fight.

Jack Hodge received a poisoned arrow in the side; Reckless Joe one in the leg. Their wounds were bound with moistened tobacco at first, or they would have proved fatal. Clay Wells was too feeble to ride, and he had a wild, insane look, which was not favorable to his speedy recovery. With the exceptions of the worry on account of Clay, and Joe's wound, Rely, or as we must now call her, Miss Wells, was perfectly happy, and she had continually begged of Joe not to return to the Rio Grande, but had not been able to get him to promise her this favor, as it was his duty to serve out his term of six months, if the company were not disbanded.

But we will leave our brave detachment of Rangers to their travels, and meet them in the Alamo City.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARRIAGE BELLS AND BELLES.

The gallant bridegroom by her side,
Beheld his prize with victor's pride,
And the glad mother in her ear
Was closely whispering words of cheer.

Yet, sad he stood his horse beside,
And, lingerling, eyed his lovely bride,
Until he saw the starting tear
Spoke woe he might not stop to cheer.

"I may not, dare not, fancy now
The grief that clouds thy lovely brow,
I dare not think upon thy vow,
And all it promised me.

"A time will come with feeling fraught!
For, if I fall in battle fought,
Thy hapless husband's dying thought
Shall be a thought on thee.

"And if, returning from conquered foes,
How blithely will the evening close,
How sweet the linnet sing repose
To Martha and to me!"

ONCE more our story calls us to the Alamo City—once more to the cottage of the widow Wells, near the little old Methodist Church.

Three weeks have elapsed since we left the Rangers with their wounded—the rescued captives, who had so narrowly escaped death by torture—the females, who had been saved from a fate so horrible that no one except those who know the cruelties practiced by the red fiends, personally, by actual observation, can conceive of—and the large herds of horses and mules just started on their way to San Antonio from fort Ewell, on the Nueces river.

We will not tax the patience of our readers by relating in detail the oft repeated, same old story—love scenes between our friend Reckless Joe and Miss Martha Wells, who had been persuaded, not much against her will, to consent to a marriage with her Ranger lover before he returned to the Rio Grande.

Col. Ford and Kate Luby, who had consented to visit the Alamo City, were to be present at the ceremony, as were also the Rangers who were in the Nueces fight.

The Mexican girls, some of them having relatives in San Antonio, had preferred coming on to that city to await the return of the Rangers to the Bravo, rather than go with the small escort that could be spared them at the Nueces.

We pass over, also, the joyous though sad meeting between Mrs. Wells, her daughter, and sick son Clay; over the raptures of the wife of John G. Moore, who once more clasped in her arms one she had mourned as dead; and the welcome the Rangers received from the citizens of San Antonio, the cheers that greeted them as they marched through streets and plazas with the plunder of the Indian camp, and rescued captives. We deal more with stern facts connected with frontier life than street or domestic scenes; but the last and most pleasant event connected with our story, although it is within the confines of civilization, must be described, as it concerns those we have followed through dark and bloody experiences.

As we walk up the street to the Methodist Church, we observe a score of horses are tied to the fences adjoining the church and dwelling of Mrs. Wells.

The Sharpe's carbines hanging from the saddle-horns—the blankets rolled up and secured on the cantles of the saddles—canteens, tin cups, etc., show us that these animals belong to our Ranger friends.

As we come nearer we see the Rangers reclining in and about the yard of the cottage, attired a little more neatly perhaps, but still in the picture-some costume of the Rio Grande.

The doors of the church are open and we have not long to wait before we observe the wedding procession start from the cottage to the church.

Col. Ford, with Mrs. Wells and Kate Luby, take the lead, and Reckless Joe, with the bride, follows. They do not care for etiquette. A score of the mates of Martha Wells, young lady friends and acquaintances, among which is her sister, Mary Wells, follow behind Joe and Rely.

Kit Carson, Jr., with the beautiful Mexican captive, Celestie, clinging closely to the sleeve of his buckskin jacket, come next; then follow twelve señoritas clothed in white muslin, each leaning upon the arm of one of our Ranger friends, and all seemingly happy, as they ought to be, at having escaped from their red captors.

Among those escorting the Mexican girls are Fighting Ben and Daring Bill, the two brothers; also Tom Clark, Phil Cole, Jim Ransom, Jack Hodge, pale from his recent wound, and Clown.

Big Foot Wallace strides on alone, enters the church, seats himself upon the sill of an open window, throwing one leg outside, as it comes more natural to him to straddle something, and nervously awaits the time "fur ther preacher tew sling his hitchin' words, an' make Joe and Rely pards fur life."

Mike sits upon the sward outside, rubbing his saber with a piece of buckskin, muttering to himself. "Well, it's soon we'll be wadin' thr'u' blud ag'in, an' I'm danged ef I don't think I'll stick to Kit an' the colonel as long as I've a hair upon me hed. Sure it's slushins' o' money an' land I'll git ef I stays wid 'em."

The solemn service is over; Joe G. Booth and Mrs. Martha Booth receive the congratulations of their friends.

The sombreros of the Rangers are whirled over their heads, and wild hurrahs resound in the little church.

The Rangers "shake" with the colonel, Mrs. Wells, Kate Luby, Joe, Martha and the preacher, until the latter is forced to beat a retreat,

and works his way through the crowd toward the door.

His course leads him past Big Foot, who, seeing him approach, leaps from his perch in the window to the ground outside, muttering:

"This are the fust time I ever war into a Christian factory, an' ther highest I ever war tew a reg'ler genwine gospel-slinger. It's tew danged stiff an' clost here; rec'on I'll pitch fur ther ranch an' see my cat. I can sling myself round loose thar, without hurtin' anybody's 'pin'ons or feelin's," and Big Foot sprung upon his black mustang, gave a farewell yell that drowned the confused noise in the church, and loped toward the Plaza.

Rough in appearance, rough in his manners and speech, who knows but what his thoughts, if he could express them in good language, would have run as smooth as his who said:

"Bear me, some God, oh, quickly bear me hence, To wholesome solitude, the nurse of sense, Where contemplation proves her ruffled wings, And the free soul looks down on kings."

A bountiful repast was spread beneath the trees in the gardens of Mrs. Wells, and all went merry as a marriage party should; after which they adjourned to the cottage for music.

The windows being open, the Rangers could hear as they smoked their cigarettes.

Mrs. Martha Booth seated herself at the piano at the request of Col. Ford, who also called upon Kate Luby for a song.

Kate was not one of that kind of ladies who always have a cold, and if she had been, it was in the wrong climate to bring forward such an excuse.

Kate was always happy to please her friends in any way in her power.

She called on Martha Booth for the music of the "Song of the Texan Ranger," and in a voice which brought all the Rangers to their feet from the lawn outside, and caused them to crowd the windows, she sung:

"Dashing o'er the prairies, free from toil and care, Scouting through the chaparrals, camping here and there, Mounted on mustangs as fleet as ever Camanche did ride, Rifle always ready and revolver by our side.

CHORUS:

"Then mount my boys, and away! The trail is broad and clear, And when you see the Reds, Just at them with a cheer!

* * * * *
"The Alamo we have not forgot, and Texans never will; And the Bandits they shall hear it mingled with our yell, And the Bandits they shall hear it mingled with our yell—our yell—our yell! (Chorus.)

"Free and fearless, over plain and wood we roam; Where night overtakes us, there we make our home; By the streamlet's smooth green bank, or the canyon's dry bed, From the Bravo's chaparrals, away far to the Red. (Chorus.)

"Now by Reds we're surrounded, war-cries fill the air; Arrows darting 'round us, flends in paint and hair; Lances glist'ning in the sun, the Texans' yells resound; Warriors give their dying whoop, the mustang his last bound. (Chorus.)

"And now on the Mexican border we dash for Cortina's hand, And drive the thieving bandits into the Rio Grande; They are gasping now in the water and dying on the shore, While 'Remember the Alamo' is heard 'bove battle's roar! While 'Remember the Alamo' is heard 'bove battle's roar—the roar—the roar—the roar—the roar!"

Loud *vivas* rent the air outside as Kate finished this dashing song, so appropriately chosen for the listeners.

"Who writ that song?" asked Tom Clark.

"My pard, Little Yank," answered Reckless Joe.

"I thought that ware his style o' slingin' English," said Tom.

"I think the music is perfectly splendid," added Kate. "You can hear the horses galloping in the refrain. The composer must have been a very talented man—a star in the music world."

"You bet, he's a *white* man," said Kit. "He's worth five hundred and sixteen common men—a regular Washington stamp of a gent. My uncle Kit run ag'in' him in Boston, 'way down in Yankee land."

"Kit," said Colonel Ford, "you can sing, I know; so give us something in that line. You look happy enough to sing, with your *Spanish Dictionary* under your arm."

"Don't call this lady out of her name, colonel. Allow me to introduce you to Celestie Garcia; I call her Bonita, our Rio Grande pet name. She was to be the squaw of Jumping Bear, had not that warrior taken a sudden jump into the happy hunting-grounds."

Colonel Ford and Kate Luby were soon conversing with the Mexican girl in her own tongue, but Joe interrupted them by asking if Celestie would not prevail upon Kit to sing. The latter overhearing, said:

"Sing? Yes; I rec'on I can make a lunge in

that direction," and in his usual prompt, nervous style, without any preliminary remarks, he launched out, with a languishing look toward Celestie:

"You are lovely as the prairie flowers,
That all around you bloom;
Your step is graceful as the fawn's,
Your breath is sweet perfume;
Your eyes are dark as midnight,
But full of love they glow,
Mount your mustang, and fly with me;
Bonita, don't say no!

CHORUS:

"I'll range no more the chaparrals;
Or the plains 'gainst Indian foe;
Tear off my spurs with tinkling bells;
Bonita, don't say no!

"Your life shall be a happy dream,
I'll be your humble slave,
Don't look distrustfully at me,
Believe me I'm no knave;
We met beneath the flash of lights,
In the gay fandango,
I loved you then, I love you now;
Bonita, don't say no! (Chorus.)

"My Texan cabin is of logs,
And stands by flowing stream,
Shaded from the burning sun
By branches ever green;
Mustangs in plenty you shall ride
Where'er you choose to go,—
Come, kiss me, señorita, fair,—
Bonita, don't say no! (Chorus.)

"The sweet scents from magnolias
Shall hover in the air,
Mocking-birds' songs, and rippling stream,
Shall drive away all care;
Then fly with me from the Rio Grande;
To my Texan home we'll go,
Or my heart will break, my darling—
Bonita, don't say no! (Chorus.)

A deafening round of applause greeted Kit as the song ended, and the ladies complimented him highly.

"That's another of Little Yank's songs," said Tom. "He can be hard one day and soft the next; dang'est cuss I ever seen."

But we will not linger longer with the wedding-party. Suffice to say that all were happy and that it broke up at a late hour.

A barbecue was given to the Rangers by the citizens of San Antonio, the same week that Reckless Joe swore: "By all the gods of ancient Greece, he'd stand before the world against the world, with ready heart and hand, to combat all the ills and smooth the pathway of his Texan bride, Rely."

But, he had not long to linger by her side. Colonel Ford and his Rangers were soon on their way to the Rio Grande, Cortina having again invaded the State.

Col. John Ford (Old Rip Ford) is now—at this writing—a member of the Texas Legislature, and can be seen any day on the avenue walking from his hotel to the State House, and ten to one you do not meet Ben Thompson (Fighting Ben), or Billie Thompson (Daring Bill) on the same avenue.

Clown you will meet in San Antonio; everybody knows him by that name, and he is probably the only man on the continent who can say he whipped and drove off fifteen Indians, killing eleven of them single-handed.

Jack Hodge died at White Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, in consequence of the poisoned arrow wound received in the Nueces river fight.

Joe G. Booth (Reckless Joe) does business in Dallas, Texas, but lives in Terrell, an adjoining town, where, if you choose to go to his cottage, you will be well treated by Mrs. Booth—none other but our friend, Martha Wells, or Rely; and a little Reckless Joe will show you how to ride a mustang, and two young fairy Relys will gather wild flowers from the prairies for you.

Tom Clark was killed in the public market in San Antonio shortly after returning from the Rio Grande by two desperadoes, but both were shot through the heart after Tom had received his mortal stab. He died with his hands in mine, and as I closed his eyes I knew that one of my best friends on earth was dead.

Jim Ransom is in New Mexico. Jim Bearfield ranches it on the Medina river.

Big Foot Wallace meanders about up and down the Nueces, or San Miguel, catching a mustang, or knocking a deer over, as he chooses; but his cat died from the wounds received in the Indian surprise-party, there being no one to take proper care of her when Big Foot went to the big Cortina scrape.

Kate Luby is now in Corpus Christi, teaching language and music to Texan girls, and takes great pride in her three sons, who are posted in all prairie knowledge.

John G. Moore lives in Terrell, Texas, and owns thousands of acres of land, and more stock than he can estimate.

Gen. Juan N. Cortina, once the bandit chief, accepted the cross of the Legion of Honor, through Emperor Maximilian, from Napoleon III, and afterward turned over his numerous forces to Juarez. In his pretended submission to the French, he escaped the Scylla of Gen. Mejia's Legion, by which he was hemmed in in Matamoras, and the Charybdis of the many "Gringoes" or Americans who were watching for him on the other side of the Rio Grande.

His release from the military prison of Vera Cruz, on \$15,000 bail, last spring, is fresh in the memory of all, and its injustice maddening to Texans.

His vagrant followers, even now, are lurking in the chaparrals, and not a week passes without the spilling of blood between Gringoes and Greasers.

Clay Wells is in the Texas lunatic asylum, having never recovered from the blow given with the war-club on the Nueces.

Bill George (Texas Bill), is sheriff of Lancaster, Texas.

Kit Carson, Jr., is around among us.

Wild Will was as bad as represented. I saw him cut his horse to death myself on the ride through our camp, on Banketta Creek.

P. S.—Phil Cole was shot dead by Wild Bill in Ellsworth, Kansas, in 1875. He was standing in a bar-room door in the night, shooting off his six in the air (as was his way, and as I have described in Fort Brown), when Bill shot him through the heart, and also his deputy sheriff by mistake, who was coming to his assistance—Bill thinking his aid was a pal of Phil's.

This last spring Fighting Ben had a fight with roughs in Ellsworth, and killed two.

SAM.

THE END.

AN OLD-FASHIONED MISSISSIPPI DUEL.

BY BOWIE KNIFE.

AFTER the cession of Louisiana to Spain, by France, under the secret treaty of 1762, the Government sent over officers of every grade to take charge of the country, and to administer laws, as they were dealt out in Spain itself. The consequence was that the great door that was opened to plunder or accumulation of wealth, by those in office, especially in the titles to the lands of Louisiana, the finest in the world, proved gold mines to all in power, for as there was no law except such as was administered by those in place, and from which there was virtually no appeal, for there was no "Philip sober," so nothing could be consummated without a *proper reason* to the officials, which, when that was done, all else became clear and free from difficulty.

I owned a plantation once, where the survey called for a line two miles in length, but which, on running out, went a mile and a half further. Land being plenty, the grant was determined by the fee to the surveyor. After it had passed the regular gantlet of the "Commandant," for as land could only be granted by the Commandant, and, of course, for *good and valid reasons*, so, of course, all the officers in detail must also be *reasoned with*, and when I inform you that no original title could be taken away, but had to be lodged and left with the government officials, who would give you a copy only, which is practiced to this day in Louisiana, it can readily be seen what extraordinary powers were lodged in the hands of the Spanish officials, and what opportunities were presented for them to turn an "honest penny." As "addition and silence" were the great virtues, "division" soon followed, in the shape of fresh flocks of officials, continually arriving to take the places of the well-filled swarms, who, like the busy bees, had improved "each shining hour." Many of the finest plantations in the Valley of the Mississippi, near the City of Natchez, were granted and held solely from the whim of the Commandant.

or from a properly balanced reason, known only to himself and the grantee; for as the officials in Spain plundered the officials in Louisiana, so the officials in Louisiana, in their turn, plundered all under them, and they again plundered all below them, till the system became as regular as clockwork, and twice as easy. And to show how incensed they were at the cessation of this "aufferous lacteal," after the sale by Napoleon to the United States, all the deeds, books of record, etc., were carried off to Havana, where you were compelled to go, for a period of more than a quarter of a century, either to procure a copy of your own honest title, or to procure a false and forged one, certified by the proper officer to be correct, just, and true.

Great irritation had existed on the part of Spain on account of the navigation of the Mississippi River, and port of deposit at New Orleans, from the termination of the Revolutionary war, when all the territory of Great Britain east of the Mississippi River, from the Lake of the Woods to the Iberville River, then through Lake Maurepas and Pontchartrain to the Gulf became the property of the United States, and duels and combats of the most ferocious and bloody character were continually occurring. While the Spaniard had lost some of the good traits of his ancestors, he had preserved his courage, which by crossing with the Moors, had added ferocity to his natural pride and arrogance. This prompted them to consider all others as inferiors, and especially Republicans,

and as only the most bold and daring of their adventurers came to this country, it may well be imagined that they were a dangerous race to deal with. But when the sale of Louisiana, by Napoleon, to the United States, in 1803, took place, their ire knew no bounds. Napoleon having never taken formal possession of Louisiana, after the sale by Spain to him by the treaty of St. Ildefonso, in the year 1800, so they hoped and hoped on, that something would turn up which would still keep them in possession of their loved El Dorado. But when the Government of the United States prepared to take possession of the territory, then rage and violence became the order of the day, and probably more duels were fought and lives lost during that period than at any other in this country, or in the world. Nor were the men who were the antagonists of the Spaniards their inferiors in any sense, but infinitely their superiors; for when the Valley of the Mississippi was thrown open to the nation, it was promptly sought after by a race of men peculiar to the times, and superior to any on the face of the earth for the position thus opened, for by none others than those so-called bordermen could peace or law have ever been settled or established. Pioneers on the great march to empire, begotten and born amid Indian wars and combats, nursed or fed by mothers between the lulls of aiding their husbands to defense against the red-skins, cradled between ramrods, and put to sleep with the war-whoop of the Indian for their lullaby, they grew up to consider that war and battle was the natural condition of man, and peace the exception.

Consequently, they never left their homes without their darling rifle in the hollow of their arm, their reliable bowie-knife in their bosom, and in every way prepared for war, for as they could not go to their fields or gardens without danger from the Indians, as every bush contained a red-skin, and every hollow a savage, so every movement became a military maneuver, and every departure from home a martial expedition. In this manner their keen eyes were ever on the alert for danger; their cool brain never at fault; their brave hearts never quailing in the hour of peril; and their steady hands always ready to direct their never-erring rifle-ball. Nor were their physical qualities otherwise than in accord with their mental. Possessed of hardy, powerful frames, capable of sustaining great hardships and exposure, not surpassed by the savage, with an agility equal to his muscular strength far superior, a head better fitted for skill and resources, they possessed one quality far superior to the Indian, and before which he went down, and sunk forever from existence; that was the unflinching lion nerve that, in the death-grapple, always shone so conspicuously, and always came off victor from the combat. Saving or rescuing their families from the savage made them doubly dear; procuring their food or game in deadly conflict made it far sweeter; and the toil and danger of their condition became a necessary part of their existence, which rendered life doubly valuable and prized. Standing, as they did, on the dangerous confines between civilization and the uncivilized country of the savage, they partook as easily of the hospitality of the one as of the rudeness of the other; an unfailing shield to peaceful society, they formed an impenetrable barrier to the ravages of the Indian, who, although leagued and led by the best of their leaders, and whose rude virtues will compare with any other untutored race ever mentioned in history, such as Powhatan, Red Jacket, Black Hawk, Osceola, etc., yet have all disappeared,

"And through the forests where they roamed,
There rings no hunter's shout."

and gone down before the invincible prowess of such men as Boone, Bowie, and their companions.

The hero of this narrative, "Rezin Bowie," was one of the most perfect specimens of his class that could be found or imagined. His physical proportions were as near perfection as man could reach. Standing about five feet eleven inches in height, weighing about 210 pounds, with every limb as beautiful and round as though it came from a turner's lathe, with a splendidly-balanced head, setting upon as handsome a formed neck and shoulders as could be wished for, large, heavily-muscled arms, very large thighs, going down to a high-instep foot, without a particle of spare flesh upon him, and with as pleasant, good-natured expression of face as I ever saw, and which, but for the keen, searching expression of the eye, might have passed for the profile and head of some good, worthy, plain parson, made one of the most extraordinary men that it had ever been my fate to meet with. One point in his character was his singular apparent good nature, for, no matter what the danger or excitement, his pleasant expression never left him. It was not the unmeaning smile from lack of decision,

"But the stern joy which warriors feel," based upon sound perception of their position, and high confidence in their ability to meet and overcome the condition. Another was the involuntary habit, upon entering a room or any

strange place, of throwing his eyes rapidly around and taking in its contents, which I noticed even in my own handsomely-furnished parlor, when he visited me in after years. Nor was his intellect at all inferior to his body, for a better balanced judgment, a more sound, discriminating head, a braver heart, a more self-reliant action, or a fiercer temper, could, perhaps, be nowhere found. Had he possessed the advantages of education and opportunity, he would have made one of the most remarkable characters of history, fitted for high deeds of daring, responsibility, and success.

As a matter of course in such a political condition of affairs and with such materials of men, duels and combats of every description were not only unavoidable, but became the incessant order of the day, and which it was either impossible or impolitic for the authorities to quell. The Spaniards, from their excited feelings, had no disposition to, while the American authorities, too weak and too far removed from succor and relief, were unable to, even if they had been willing. What was true collectively, of course was true individually, and, with such combustible materials as Bowie and his antagonists possessed, where only a spark was needed to create an explosion, that explosion was never long deferred.

The most fertile source of duels were the Spanish women, for, possessed of all the beauty and fascinations of old Spain, with the same love of gayety, desire of romance, and love of admiration and excitement, of which, one favorite was the dance:

"When beneath the evening star,
She mingled in the gay bolero,"

and the other was the national instrument,

"When she sings to her attuned guitar,
Of Moorish knight or Christian hero."

to which, of course, all classes of Americans became addicted and participated in; and, as the occasion for the enjoyment of these was better and more easily and pleasantly indulged in in public, so balls or parties were common and so frequent as to become a portion of the customs of the country. As the border-men were all fond of the dance, even though it was the rude heel and toe, or the "corn-shucking" jig, as every one, who ever passed down the Mississippi knows full well, yet, if they could not perform the fandango or any of the dances of Spain, they could enjoy seeing them danced by the Spanish girls who performed the "pas seul" to the accompaniment of their own rattling, exciting castanets, as better adapted to show their own skill and voluptuous grace, and at the same time relieve their American admirers from any such, to them, unknown measures.

It was at one of these balls or parties (about 1806) near Donaldsonville, that Bowie was talking to one of those bewitching señoritas, for, with woman's quickness, they soon could make themselves understood in that hashed jargon, called the English language, or *Los Americanos* soon learned the smooth, beautiful, musical language of Spain, the only language fit to be spoken to a woman, who, having finished her dance, and laid aside her castanets, was handling her inevitable fan with her usual skill and success, upon Bowie, who was seated by her side. An officer in the showy Spanish uniform approached him, and said, "You take a liberty, sir." To which Bowie replied, "In what way?" "If you have not the brains to comprehend that, perhaps you will this," said the officer, at the same time throwing a glassful of wine, which he had in his hand, in Bowie's face.

A flush of excitement crossed Bowie's countenance for a moment, but, pulling out his handkerchief and wiping the wine away, he smilingly said to his insulter, still standing in front of him: "That would have been more pleasant in the throat than in the face," and went on conversing with his fair companion. His insulter, after some sneering remark about Yankees, turned on his heel and walked off. Not long after, Bowie, resigning his seat beside the bewitching señorita to some ardent admirer, went around to look for his self-made foe, and descrying him with several others standing at one end of the room, as though guarding the stairs and exit from the room, as in all Spanish houses the lower floor was never used for parlors or chambers, but the second floor was reserved for that purpose, and apparently determined that Bowie should not leave the room except after a combat. But Bowie, walking up to him, said pleasantly, "I come to return your compliment," at the same time dealing him a sharp blow in the face. The officer attempted some retaliation, but Bowie, seizing him by the throat, dragged him to the stairs and hurled him down, causing some bruises as well as starting some blood. Of course, there was excitement in the immediate vicinity of the stairs, but beyond that there was scarce a ripple, for those matters were so common that they created only a passing interest, and Bowie and others enjoyed themselves,

"And danced all night.
Till broad daylight,
And went home with the girls in the morning."

Early next morning an officer waited on Bowie, with the usual cartel, and left it for reply. A friend of Bowie's—for there was no lack of friends in those times, as no one knew at what moment his own case might need the same—soon after returned the call with Bowie's acceptance, and proceeded to arrange the terms, such being the law of the "duello," but was not a little surprised to learn that Bowie's antagonist claimed the choice of weapons, terms, etc., under the Spanish custom, which was that when blood had been drawn upon any party, that party had the right of selecting weapons, and all matters belonging thereto. Bowie had determined for his choice rifles, at ten steps; still he had no alternative but accordance to the rule, and was soon after notified by his friend, that he had accepted the terms of the duel, which was to take place with knives, and to continue as long as both parties were living, and could maintain the combat. In order to make the affair more vindictive and marked, the Spaniard had selected the grave-yard at Donaldsonville as the place of combat; and on Bowie reaching there, with his two friends and surgeon, he was not a little surprised to see a grave already dug, beside which they were to fight, and which his antagonist had proclaimed Bowie should speedily fill.

When they were placed in position, according to the terms, which were that "both parties stand upright, facing each other, the left leg of each advanced so that the knee of each of that leg should be past the knee of his antagonist; the left arm hanging down perpendicularly by the left side, the right arm held horizontally from the elbow, across the breast; grasping the knife immediately over the heart; both to be in their shirt-sleeves; the second giving the word (to be settled by tossing up a dollar between the seconds), to ask, 'Gentlemen, are you ready?' and, on receiving the answer, if ready, or, after the lapse of half a minute, if no response from one or both, then to give the word 'Strike!' after which the combat should begin, and continue till one or the other was killed or disabled."

When both combatants were placed in position, alongside the grave before stated, Bowie found that his antagonist was taller than himself, much less stout, and with longer, thinner arms, and that his face gave evidence of much excitement, ill suppressed rage and hostility. Bowie was perfectly calm, his cool brain and keen eye measuring his antagonist; looking out for the weak spots, and carefully arranging his plan of action.

Reader, if you have ever been placed in any such position, or where your life was dependent upon any action or circumstance, you would be astonished to find how much can be accomplished in a short space of time. I have been where upon one second of time has depended my life, or that of my antagonist. All this passed through the brain of Bowie in one-tenth part of the time that you will read it.

Just as the knives were about to be handed to them, the Spaniard, with great ferocity, exclaimed, "Tie his knees to mine! This cursed Yankee will run when he sees cold steel!" This was accordingly done with a silk handkerchief of one of the party, certainly a very desperate speculation with such a man as Rezin Bowie. When the question "Are you ready?" was asked, the Spaniard, excitedly, furiously answered affirmatively, while Bowie made no reply, watching for the next word.

As soon as given, quickly raising both hands, with the left, Bowie seized his antagonist by the hair, dragged his head down, while with his right he stabbed him with his knife, expecting to cut his head off, but supposing that his foe would come over hard, he had put too much strength in his left hand; and the Spaniard, taken by surprise, had not made the resistance that Bowie had expected, so that when his knife inflicted the blow, instead of the knife meeting the Spaniard's neck, it went under his left shoulder blade; and while Bowie was trying and working to get it loose, it snapped off near the handle, being one of those foolish English knives of no account to any one. Quickly seizing the Spaniard's right hand, with which he had been furiously cutting the air, Bowie wrenched his knife, and raising his head, in another second would have sent his antagonist to the grave he had dug for Bowie, when the viscerations of the Spaniard, and the entreaties of his seconds, prevailed upon Bowie to spare the life of his foe.

Their knees were accordingly untied, the Spaniard attended by the surgeon, who extracted the blade of the knife, dressed the wound, and he, in due course of time, became well as ever, though his escape was very lucky.

Years rolled on after this, and Bowie, having at times indulged in peaceful operations of land speculations, especially in Spanish grants, which had been given in old times freely, had gone to Havana to get some copies and papers from the Land Office there, which had been carried off, as before stated. He was not a little surprised one day, while walking quietly on the street, to find himself first accosted, then grasped by the hand, then seized in the embrace, and kissed on the cheek (the highest compliment

that a Spaniard could pay) by a tall, fine-looking officer in full uniform, while the complimentary words of "dear friend," "deliverer," "Santa Maria," "bon comrade," etc., followed in quick, excited succession. Nor could Bowie comprehend the condition until the stranger officer explained that he was his friend, whose life Bowie had saved at Donaldsonville; when, returning the grasp with equal warmth, the officer insisted upon adjourning to a cafe, where they discussed sundry bottles of wine, etc., which attentions did not cease till Bowie left the island, amid the hearty salutations and greetings of his new-found friend—a termination, which, as Bowie said, was, after all, perhaps better than sending his antagonist to the "happy hunting-grounds," a conclusion that most of your readers will agree to.

(Commenced in Number One.)

The Death-Shot.

BY CAPT. MAYNE REID.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SOUTH-WESTERN SHERIFF.

AFTER his arrest, Richard Darke was to be conveyed to the county jail—about three miles from his father's residence.

The men, who had made him prisoner, took note of every circumstance attending the arrest. They searched the chamber in which he had slept—the whole house, in fact. There were few of them who owed Ephraim Darke any goodwill, but many the contrary. His accumulated wealth, used only for selfish ends, had not gained him popularity in the neighborhood. Besides, he was not a Southerner *pur sang*, as

most of his neighbors were. They knew him to be from the New England States; and, although there was not a bit of Abolitionist in him, but much of the opposite, still he was not liked either by planter or "poor white."

The sheriff and his party, therefore, used little ceremony while in the act of making the arrest: ransacking the house, and examining its most sacred *arcana*. They took possession of the double-barreled gun, which Richard was in the habit of carrying, as also the suit of clothes he usually wore when out in the woods. In the coat—it was noted this was not the same he had on during the day of the search—was found a hole that looked as if freshly made, and by a bullet! It was through the skirt, and had a torn, tattered edge.

Among the men present when he was made prisoner, were several who could read such sign, and interpret it as surely, or more surely, than an expert would identify a particular handwriting. Notably of these was the hunter Woodley. At a glance, he pronounced the hole in the coat-skirt to have been made by a bullet, and one that had passed through the barrel of a rifled gun.

Several others, after looking at it, confirmed Woodley's assertion.

The circumstance was significant; and led to renewed conjectures among those surrounding the sheriff.

No one thought of questioning the prisoner about it—not now, that he was in the hands of the law. All further formal investigation would be postponed till the trial, soon to take place. The party arresting him only busied themselves about evidence to be sifted at a later period.

Besides the hole through the coat-skirt, the sheriff's *posse* found nothing else that seemed to point specially toward the crime—except the double-barreled gun. To its bore exactly fitted the bullet which the hunters had extracted from the cypress-knee, and which was now in possession of those instructed to prosecute. Woodley, however, apart, and acting on his own account,

had discovered a pair of boots, heavily laden with mud, hidden away under a heap of rubbish at the bottom of an old peach orchard. The backwoodsman had surreptitiously kept these to himself, intending to make private, and particular, use of them; his comrade, Heywood, being alone made privy to the secret of their discovery.

Having finished their investigation of the premises, the sheriff's party hurried their prisoner off to the county town; leaving his father behind in a state of terrible bewilderment, half crying, half crazily cursing.

Most of the men, hitherto following the chief officer of the law, parted with him at the plantation-gate. He and his constables were thought enough to keep charge of the accused. A sheriff in the South-western States is a very different sort of individual from the men who perform the duties of this office in the north, or the grand dignitaries, with scarce any duties at all, in a shire of England. He of the backwoods must be a man of unflinching courage—indeed, often desperate—else the mandates intrusted to him would result in a failure of justice, and a mockery of the executive power. It is rarely that they do—rare, indeed, when a Mississippian sheriff proves recreant to his trust. Far more common to find him ready to die, or at least risk death, in the performance of his dangerous duty; and not unfrequently is this the actual result. While traveling through the South-western States, I have often witnessed, and admired as well, the wonderful self-sacrificing bravery of these responsible officers of the law. Who could help admiring it?

Therefore, the party who had been with the sheriff, assisting in the arrest, saw no necessity for following him further. They had full confidence that he would deposit his prisoner within the county jail. So, parting with him and his constables—after passing out of Darke's plantation-gate—they turned off in a different direction. Whether or not the murderer had been discovered—most of them believed he was



"GO THERE, IMAGE OF ONE ONCE LOVED—PICTURE OF ONE WHO HAS BEEN FALSE."—Page 31.

—they had yet to search for the body of the murdered man.

Again, as on the day before, they separated into several parties—each taking a tract of the woods, though all keeping in the neighborhood where the blood had been spilled, and Clancy's gun and hat found.

But their search again proved as fruitless, as on the preceding day. More so: since on the second scouring of the woods nothing new was discovered that could throw additional light upon the commission of the crime, or aid them in recovering the corpse.

Again they dragged and poled the creek up and down, penetrating into the swamp, as far as was possible, or likely that a dead body could have been carried for concealment. In its deep dark recesses they found no trace of man, either living or dead; only the solitude-loving crane, the snake-bird, and the scaly alligator.

It was but a poor report to take back to the plantations; a sad one for the mother of the missing man.

She never received it. Before the returning searchers could speak the unsatisfactory intelligence into her ear, Mrs. Clancy lay cold in death.

The long-endured agony of ill fortune, the more recent one of widowhood, and now this new bereavement of a lost only son; for she fully believed him lost—basely assassinated—this accumulated anguish was too much for her woman's strength, of late failing. And when the neighbors got back, clustering around her dwelling, they could hear sounds within, that told of some new disaster.

On the night before they had heard the same; but now the tone was different. Then the widow's voice was lifted in lamentation; now it was not heard at all.

Whatever of mystery there might be, it soon received elucidation.

A woman, coming out upon the porch, and raising her hand in token of silence, said, in sad, solemn voice,

"Mrs. Clancy is dead!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "BELLE OF NATCHEZ."

WHILE search was being made for the body of the murdered man—while that of his mother, alike murdered, was lying cold upon her bed of death—while the murderer of both was cowering within the cell of a prison—a steamboat was cleaving the current of the Red River of Louisiana; slowly forging its course up-stream; its single paddle-wheel—for it had only one—beating the ocher-colored water into foam, that, floating far behind, danced and simmered upon the surface, foaming a wake-way of what appeared to be blood-froth.

It was a little "stern-wheel" steamer, such as in those days plied upon many of the tributaries of the Mississippi; the impulsive power being confined to a single set of paddles, placed where the rudder acts in most other vessels, and looking very much like the wheel of an old-fashioned water-mill.

The boat in question was called the "Belle of Natchez," perhaps somewhat pretentiously: since it was but an indifferent sort of craft—small in size, and poor in its appointments. On the particular trip of which we are speaking it might more appropriately have laid claim to the distinctive appellation; since it carried a young lady who, for some time, had borne it without denial or dispute.

The lady was Helen Armstrong, known among Mississippians as the "Belle of Natchez." By singular coincidence, the boat so designated was bearing her away from her Mississippi home—from scenes long loved and cherished; once joyful, now sad; in retrospect only sacred to the sacrifice of her heart.

Was she leaving that heart behind her? No. It was with her, within her breast; but breaking—well-nigh broken.

The "high-pressure" steam-craft that ply upon the western rivers of America have but slight resemblance to the black, low-hulled Leviathans that plow the waters of the Atlantic. The steamer of the Mississippi more resembles a house, rounded off at the corners to an oblong oval shape, painted snow-white, two stories in height, the upper one furnished on each face with a row of casement windows, which serve also as outside doors to the state-rooms. Inside ones, opposite these, give admission to the main cabin, or "saloon," which runs midway through the boat for almost its whole length—glass folding doors dividing it into three compartments. These are the ladies' cabin aft, the dining-saloon in the center, and a third division forward containing a "bar," used only by the male passengers, for smoking, drinking, and too often gambling.

Along the casements, opening outside, each furnished with green jalousies or Venetian shutters, runs a narrow balcony, with a low balustrade, or guard-rail, to keep a careless passenger from falling off into the flood. The same is carried round the stern of the boat, ladies' cabin included. A projection of the roof, termed the "hurricane deck," acts as an awning to this outside gallery, shading it from the

sun. Two immense twin-chimneys—or "funnels," as called—stand up out of the hurricane-deck, pouring forth a continuous volume of white wood-smoke; while a third but smaller tube, termed the "scape-pipe," intermittently vomits smoke still whiter; the steam at each emission giving a hoarse bark that may be heard for miles along the river.

On such a steamer—differing from others only in having a stern-wheel instead of side-paddles—had Colonel Armstrong embarked with his family, transporting them to the "wilder west."

And up the Red River of Louisiana they were making way; slowly, as a stern-wheel boat of scarce a hundred horse-power, against a rapid and turbulent current, must needs make it.

It was the hour of night—the second after leaving Natchez—but not late. Lights gleaming from open cabin windows, or shimmering through the Venetian shutters, told that but few, if any, of the passengers had yet retired to rest. It was, in truth, but the after-tea hour, when the tables of the main saloon had been cleared, and gentlemen, as also ladies, sat around them to read; play cribbage; perhaps, take a hand at some round game of cards, as "vingt-un" or "beggar-my-neighbor." The square games—often not so square as regards the honesty of the play—were carried on in the bar-saloon, further forward.

On this particular "trip" there chanced to be many lady passengers on board the Belle of Natchez—as also several gentlemen—some of them accomplished and agreeable. For this reason the Armstrong girls had no need to be sufferers from solitude.

Notwithstanding, one of them was so—seeming to prefer it.

Is it necessary to say which? No. The reader has already guessed—Helen.

Escaping from the saloon, with its continuous hum of conversation—from speeches that but wearied, and flattery that only fashed her—she had taken refuge on the stern-guards of the boat, abaft the ladies' cabin. Notwithstanding the hour, she there found herself alone. The other ladies had each some attraction to keep them inside—her sister a very particular one.

In Jessie's case it was a young planter named Dupre; a Louisianian Creole, who had his plantation in the neighborhood of Natchitoches, whither the boat was bearing them. He had been to Natchez upon business, and was now returning home.

His handsome features, brunette complexion, black eyes, and gracefully curling hair had made havoc with the heart of Jessie Armstrong, in less than twenty-four hours after their first meeting. *En revanche*, her contrasting colors of red, blue, and gold, seemed to have held their own in the amorous encounter.

So that, before the Belle of Natchez had steamed fifty miles up the Red River, these two of her passengers, judging from their behavior, showed unmistakable symptoms of making a much longer voyage in company—in short, a journey through life.

Colonel Armstrong took note of their "billing and cooing," but made no objection to it. Why should he? The gentleman was known upon the boat as one of the wealthiest planters in his State; equally noted as a noble young fellow—brave, accomplished, and of irreproachable character—such as are often found among the Creoles of Louisiana.

Jessie Armstrong had chosen well; though it was not wealth that had influenced her choice. Only love—intuitive, instinctive; true love, with, perhaps, the usual alloy of passion.

Her elder sister had no jealousy, not even envy. The love that occupied Helen's heart—that had torn, and left it lorn—was the one love of a life. It could never be replaced by another. If she had any thought about her sister's new-sprung happiness, it was not envy at her being happy, but sadness from its light of joy contrasting with the shadow of her own misery.

As she stood upon the stern-guards of the steamboat, her eyes now mechanically bent upon the revolving wheel that whipped the water into foam, now piercing the darkness beyond, she felt stealing over her a darker thought—that still more terrible than sadness—that which oft prompts to life's annihilation. The man to whom she had given her heart—its firstlings as well as fullness—a heart in which there could be no second gleanings, and she knew it—this man had made light of the sacrifice. And it was a sacrifice grand, because glowing with the whole interests of her life.

The life, too, of a woman gifted with rare excellences of spirit and person; queenly, commanding; above all, beautiful.

She did not think this about herself, as she leant over the guard-rail of the steamer. She only thought of her humiliation; of having been humiliated by him at whose feet she had flung herself; fondly, but too recklessly, surrendering that which woman holds most dear—the last syllable of rendition.

To Charles Clancy she had spoken it—in writing only, but in terms unmistakable. The remembrance of that was now the cause of her chagrin, as of her shame.

Both might be ended in an instant. A step over the railing, a plunge into the red rolling river, a momentary struggle amidst its foaming waves—not to save life, but to destroy it—this, and all would be over! Sadness, jealousy, disappointed love—these bitter passions, and all others alike—could be ended in one little effort—a leap into oblivion!

Her nerves were fast becoming strung to the taking it. The past all seemed dark, the future still darker. For her, life had lost its fascinations, while death was equally divested of its terrors.

Suicide in one so young, so fair, so incomparably lovely, one capable of charming others, no longer to be charmed herself! Suicide, fearful to think of! And yet she was contemplating it!

She stood upon the guards, wavering, irresolute. It was no lingering love of life, nor fear of death, that caused her to hesitate. Nor yet the horrid form of death she could not fail to see before her, sprung she but over that slight railing.

The moon was up, coursing the sky above in full effulgence, its beams falling upon the broad bosom of the river. At intervals the boat, keeping the deeper channel, was forced close to either bank. Then, as the surging eddies set the floating, but stationary, logs in motion, the huge saurian asleep on them could be heard giving a grunt at having been so rudely awakened, and pitching over into the current with a sullen plunge.

She saw and heard all this. It should have shaken her nerves, and caused trembling throughout her frame.

It did neither the one nor the other. The despair of life deadened all dread of death—even of being devoured by an ugly alligator!

Fortunately, at that moment, a gentle hand was laid upon her shoulder, and a soft voice sounded in her ear. They were the hand and voice of her sister.

Jessie, coming out from the state-room behind, had glided silently up. She saw Helen prepossessed, sad, and could divine the cause. She little knew how near things had been to a fatal climax—and dreamt not of the diversion her coming had caused.

"Sister!" she said, caressingly, "why do you stay out here? The night is chilly; and they say the atmosphere of this Red River country is full of miasma, with fevers to follow, and argues to shake the comb out of one's hair! Let us go inside, then! There's right good company in the cabin, and we're going to have a round game at cards—vingt-un, or something of the sort. Come in with me!"

Helen turned round, trembling at the other's touch, as if she had been a criminal, and it was the sheriff's hand she felt upon her shoulder.

Jessie noticed the strange, strong emotion. She could not fail to do so. Attributing it to its remotest cause, that morning confided to her, she said:

"Be a woman, Helen! a true, strong woman, as I know you are! Don't think of him any more. There's a new world, a new life, opening to both of us. Forget the sorrows of the old, as I shall. Pluck Charles Clancy from your heart, and fling every memory, every thought of him, to the winds! I say again, be a woman—be yourself! Forget the past, and think only of the future—of our father!"

The words came like a galvanic shock, at the same time soft and soothing as balm. They had this effect upon the spirit of Helen Armstrong. They had touched a tender chord—that of filial affection.

And it vibrated true to the touch.

Flinging her arms around Jessie's neck, and kissing her rose-tinted cheek, she said:

"Sister, you have saved me!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

SEIZED BY SPECTRAL ARMS.

"SISTER, you have saved me!"

Such was Helen Armstrong's speech, as she placed her head on her sister's shoulder, and pressed that sister's cheek with lips pouring forth affection.

Returning the kiss, Jessie looked not a little perplexed. She could neither comprehend the meaning of the words, nor their choking utterance. Equally was she at a loss to account for the convulsive trembling throughout her sister's frame, while their bosoms remained in contact.

Helen gave her no time to ask questions.

"Go in!" she said, causing the other to face round, and pushing her toward the door of the state-room—"In, and set the vingt-un a-going. I'll join you for the game by the time you've got the cards dealt."

Jessie, glad to see her sister once more in a pleasant mood, made no protest, but gleefully re-entered the cabin.

As soon as her back was turned, Helen once more faced toward the river—stepping close up to the stern guard-rail. The wheel was still revolving its paddles as before, beating the water into bubbles, and casting the reddish-white spray afar over the surface of the stream.

Now, she had no thought of flinging herself into the seething current, though she meant doing so for something else.

"Before the game of vingt-un begins," she said, "here's a pack of cards to be dealt out—with a portrait among them."

As she spoke, she drew forth a bundle of letters—evidently old letters—tied in a ribbon of blue silk. One after another, she pulled them free from the fastening—just as if dealing out cards. Each, as it came clear, was rent right across the middle, and tossed despitefully into the stream.

At the bottom of the packet, after the letters had been all disposed of, was a photograph picture. It was a likeness of Charles Clancy, given to her on one of those days when he had flung himself appealingly at her feet.

She did not tear it in twain, like the letter; though at first this appeared to be her intent. Some thought striking her, she held it up before the moon, her eyes for a time resting upon, and closely scanning it. Strange wild memories, winters of them, seemed to roll over her face, while she thus made scrutiny of the features so indelibly engraven upon her heart. She was looking her last upon them, in the hope of being able to erase the image, as she had a determination to do.

Who can tell what was then passing within that heart? Who could describe its desolation? Certainly no writer of romance.

Whatever resolve she had arrived at, for a while she appeared to hesitate about the executing it.

Then, like an echo, heard amidst the rippling waters, came back into her ear the words spoken by her sister:

"Let us think only of our father."

The thought decided her; and stepping out to the extremest end of the guard-rail, she flung the photograph upon the paddles of the revolving wheel, as she did so, saying:

"Go there, image of one once loved—picture of one who has been false. Be crushed, and broken, as he has broken my heart!"

The sigh that escaped her, as she surrendered the bit of cardboard, was more like a scream—a cry of anguish. It had the accent that could only come from that she had spoken of—a broken heart.

As she turned away to re-enter the cabin of the steamboat, she seemed ill-prepared for taking part, or pleasure, in a hand of cards.

And she took not either. That game of vingt-un was never played.

Still half distraught with the agony through which her soul had passed—the traces of which she knew must be visible on her face—before appearing in the brilliantly-lighted saloon, she passed round the corner of the ladies' cabin, intending to enter her own state-room by the outside door.

It was but to spend a moment before her looking-glass, to arrange her dress, the coiffure of her hair—perhaps the expression of her face—all things that to a man may appear trivial, but to a woman important—even in the hour of sadness and despair. No blame to woman for acting thus. It is but an instinct—the primary care of her life—the secret spring of her influence and power.

In repairing to her toilette, Helen Armstrong was but following the example of her sex.

She did not follow it far—not so far as to get before the looking-glass, or even inside the room. Before entering it, she made stop by the door, and stood with face turned toward the river's bank. The boat had sheered close in shore; so close that the tall forest-trees shadowed her track—the tips of their branches almost sweeping the hurricane-deck.

They were cypresses, festooned with Spanish moss, that hung down like the drapery of a death-bed. One was blighted, stretching forth bare limbs, blanched white by the weather, desiccated and jointed like the arms of a skeleton.

It was a ghostly sight, and caused her a slight shivering, as under the clear moonbeams the steamer swept past the place.

It was a relief to her, when the boat got back again into darkness.

Only momentary; for then, under the shadow of the cypresses, amidst the fearful coruscation of the fireflies, she saw the face of Charles Clancy!

It was among the trees high up, on a level with the hurricane-deck.

It could only have been fancy? Clancy could not be there, either in the trees, or on the earth? The thing could only be a deception of her senses—a delusive vision, such as occurs to clairvoyants, at times deceiving themselves.

Hallucination or not, Helen Armstrong had no time to reflect upon it. Before the face of her false lover faded from her view, a pair of arms, black, sinewy, and stiff, were stretched toward her; roughly grasped her around the waist, and lifted her into the air!

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT BECAME OF HER.

HELEN ARMSTRONG gave a shriek, as she felt herself elevated into the air, where for a time she was held suspended. Only for an instant—just long enough for her to see the boat pass on beneath. At the same instant she caught sight of her sister, as the latter rushed out upon the

guards, and gave a piercing cry in reply to her own.

As she herself screamed a second time, whatever had seized her suddenly relaxed its hold; and her next sensation was of falling from a giddy height, till the fall was broken by a plunge into water. She experienced a severe shock, striking her almost senseless. She was only sensible of a drumming in her ears, a choking in the throat—in short, the sensation that precedes asphyxia by drowning.

The responsive cries given out by the two girls, and then continuously kept up by Jessie, brought the passengers rushing out of the saloon, a crowd collecting upon the stern-guards.

"Some one overboard!" was the thought, and the shout that rung through the vessel. It reached the ear of the pilot; who, instantly ringing the "stop" bell, caused the paddle-wheel to suspend its revolutions, bringing the steamer to a sudden stop. The strong current, against which the boat was at the time contending, contributed to its suddenness.

Meanwhile, Jessie, the only one who had witnessed the mysterious catastrophe, was too much awed by its mystery to give any intelligible explanation of it. She could only frantically exclaim:

"My sister! taken up into the air! She's now down in the water! Oh, save her! Save her!"

"In the water—where?" asked a voice, whose earnest tone spoke of readiness to respond to the appeal.

"Yonder—there—under that great tree. She was in its top first, then dropped down into the river. I heard the plunge, but did not see her after. She has sunk to the bottom. Merciful Heavens! Oh Helen—sister! Where are you?"

The people were puzzled by these incoherent speeches. Both passengers above, and boatmen on the under-deck, were alike mystified. They stood as if spell-bound.

Fortunately, one of the former had retained his presence of mind, and along with it his coolness. Fortunately, too, he had the courage to act under the emergency. As also the capacity, being a swimmer of the first class. It was he who had asked the question "Where?"—the young planter, Louis Dupre. He only waited to hear the answer. While it was being given, he had hurriedly divested himself of his coat and foot wear. In evening costume, his shoes were easily kicked off—white waistcoat and coat tossed aside at the same time. Then, without staying to hear half the offered explanation, he sprung over the guards, and swam toward the spot pointed out.

"Brave, noble fellow!" was the thought of Jessie, her admiration for the man—now her acknowledged suitor—for the moment making her forget the peril in which her sister was placed.

But it now seemed less. Confident in her lover's strength, believing him capable of anything, she felt almost sure that Helen would be saved.

She stood, as did every one else upon the steamer, watching with earnest, anxious eyes. Hers were more; they were flashing with wild feverish excitement; giving glances of hope at intervals alternating with the fixed gaze of fear—the expression of her features changing in correspondence.

There might be wonder at her hopes, but none at her fears. The moon had sunk to the level of the tree-tops, and the bosom of the river was in dark shadow; darker by the bank where the boat was now drifting. But little chance there was to distinguish an object in the water—less for one swimming upon its surface. And then the river was deep, its current rapid, its waves turbid and full of dangerous eddies. In addition, it was a spot infested—well known to be the favorite haunt of that hideous reptile, the alligator, with the equally dreaded gar-fish—the shark of the South-western waters. All these things were in the thoughts of those who stood bending over the stern-guards of the Belle of Natchez; causing them anxiety for the fate, not only of the beautiful young lady who had fallen overboard, but the handsome, courageous gentleman who had plunged in, and was swimming to her rescue.

Anxiety would be a light word—a slight, trivial feeling—compared with that throbbing in the breast, and showing itself in the countenance of Jessie Armstrong. Hers was the torture of terrible suspense; gradually growing into the acute agony of despair, as time passed, and the young planter returned not, nor was anything to be seen of him in the water. Then her father, standing by her side, could do little to comfort her. He, too, was paralyzed—a prey to agonized emotions.

The steamer's boat had been manned, and set loose as quickly as could be done. It was now right over the spot where the swimmer had been last seen, and all eyes were fixed upon it—all ears listening to catch any word of cheer.

Not long had they to listen. From the shadowed surface of the river came a shout sent up in joyous tones.

"She's saved!"

Then, quickly after, spoke a rough boatman's voice.

"All right! We've got 'em both. Throw us a rope!"

The rope was thrown by ready hands, after which came the command, "Haul in!"

A light, held high up on the steamer, flashed its beams down into the boat. Lying along its thwarts could be perceived a form—that of a lady—in a dress once white, now discolored by the muddy water filtering from its skirts. Her head rested upon the knees of a man, whose scant garments were similarly saturated.

It was Helen Armstrong, supported in the arms of Louis Depre.

She appeared lifeless; and the first sight of her drew anxious exclamations from those standing upon the steamer.

Only for a short while was the anxiety endured. A few minutes after she had been carried to her stateroom, there came from it the report that she still lived, and was out of danger. Colonel Armstrong himself imparted to his fellow-passengers this intelligence—joyfully received by every one of them.

Inside the stateroom of the two sisters, after their father had gone forth, there was a little bit of a scene, with a conversation that may be worth repeating. The younger commenced it by saying:

"Tell me, Helen! Dear sister, don't be afraid to speak the truth. Why did you jump overboard?"

"Jump overboard! What are you talking about, Jessie?"

"I declare I don't know myself. It seems such a mystery, all of it. I saw you for some time up in the air, as if hovering there, like an angel, on wings! I'd be willing to swear that I saw you so. Of course, it could only have been my fancy, frightened as I was at seeing you fall overboard. After that you appeared to drop straight down, your white skirt streaming after. Then I heard a plunge. Oh Helen! it was fearful; both the fancy and the reality. What did it mean?"

"That was just what I was asking myself at the time you saw me suspended, as you say, in the air; for so I was, dear Jessie. I soon afterward arrived at the explanation of it. Though puzzling me then, as it does you still, nothing can be more simple."

"But what was it, anyhow?"

"Well, then, it was this: As I stood leaning over the guard-rail I was suddenly carried away from it, as if by a pair of strong, bony arms. After keeping me awhile, they released me from their grasp, letting me fall plump into the river, where certainly I should have been drowned but for—"

"For Louis—my dear Louis!"

"Ah! Jessie; I don't wonder at your admiration. He deserves it all. I am envious, but not jealous. I can never know that feeling again."

"Dear sister! do not think of such things. Don't you see you haven't yet explained the strangest part? What carried you into the air? You speak of a pair of arms. What kind of arms? To whom did they belong?"

"To a ghostly cypress-tree. Yes, Jessie; that is the explanation of what mystifies you, as it did me for a while. I know all about it now. A great outstretching limb, forked at the end, had caught the steamer somewhere forward, and got bent down. It caught me, also, just as it was springing up again, and gave me the swing, and the drop, and the good ducking I've had. Now you know all."

A sweet joy thrilled through Jessie's heart on receiving this explanation. She was no longer troubled with a suspicion, hitherto distressing her. *Her sister had not intended suicide!*

CHAPTER XX.

A BACKWOODS JURY IN DELIBERATION.

The men who, after the second day's search, had returned to Mrs. Clancy's cottage, were few in number, being only her more intimate friends and well-wishers. Most of the searchers had gone direct to their own homes.

Soon, however, the news spread abroad that the mother of the murdered man was herself stricken down. This, giving a fresh stimulus to sympathy, as well as curiosity, caused all to assemble anew—many starting from the beds, to which they had betaken themselves after the day's fatigue.

Before midnight there was a crowd around the house, greater than any that had yet collected. And of the voices mingling in conversation the tone was more excited and angry. It was only subdued in the presence of that corpse, lying cold upon its couch, its pale face turned appealingly toward them.

From the dead there was no need of any appeal to cause a demand for justice. Many of the living were loudly calling for it; and close to the chamber of death, knots of men, with their heads near together, were discussing the ways and means of obtaining it surely and quickly.

In such cases there are always some who command. It may not be from any superiority of rank or wealth. In the hour of need the rightful chieftains—those whom God designed should lead—are recognized, and acknowledged.

A group, composed principally of these, stood in front of the cottage, debating what was best to be done. It was a true backwoods jury, roughly improvised, and not confined to twelve; for there were more than twenty taking part in the deliberation. They had drawn together by a sort of tacit and common consent, and by the same had a foreman been appointed, a planter of standing in the neighborhood.

The question in debate was at first twofold: Had Charles Clancy been murdered? And, if so, who was his murderer?

The former was soon decided in the affirmative. No one had the slightest doubt about the crime. The conjectures of all were turned toward the criminal. What proof could be brought forward to fix it on the man that day arrested, and who was now lying in the jail to await legal trial?

Every sign seen by any of the collected crowd, every incident that had transpired, was as calmly discussed, and carefully weighed by this rough, backwoods jury, as if it had been composed of the twelve best men to be found in the most civilized city. Perhaps with more intelligence—certainly with as much determination to arrive at a righteous verdict.

They discussed not only the occurrences of which they had been made aware, but the motives that might lead to them. Among these last came prominently up the relations that had existed between the two men. There had been nothing hitherto known to tell of any hostility, that might lead to the commission of such a crime.

There was little said about Darke's relations with the family of the Armstrongs, and less of Helen Armstrong in particular. It was suspected that he had sought the hand of the young lady; but no one thought of Clancy having been his rival. Up to that time Colonel Armstrong had maintained a proud position. It was not probable that he would have permitted his daughter to think of matching with a man circumstanced as was Charles Clancy.

Clancy's love secret had been carefully kept. None were privy to it. A few only suspected it—among these his mother, whose lips were now sealed by death.

Had the deliberating backwoodsmen but known that he had been Darke's rival suitor—still more, the successful one—it would have given a different turn to their deliberations—almost a key to the crime. Than such motive, nothing points more surely to murder.

Had Helen Armstrong been herself present among them, or near—anywhere that she could have had tidings of the tragical events exciting the settlement—there would have been no difficulty about their coming to a conclusion. The self-constituted jury would, in all probability, have been told something to elicit from them a quick verdict, an equally quick sentence, with, perhaps, its instant execution.

But Helen Armstrong was no longer there—no longer near. By that time she must have been hundreds of miles from the place, she and all related to her. Any secret she could have disclosed was not available for that trial going on by the widow Clancy's cottage.

And, as no one suspected her of having such secret, her name was only mentioned incidentally, without any thought of her being able to throw light upon the dark mystery they were endeavoring to make clear.

For several hours they remained in consultation, weighing the testimony that had been laid before them.

The circumstances that seemed to fix the guilt upon Darke were repeatedly passed in review, and still they did not bring conviction—at least, not complete. No one of them but might have been compatible with his innocence. A bullet fitting a smooth-bore fowling-piece, however exactly, was not of itself testimony sufficient to hang a man; even though Clancy's body had been found with the ball in it. Both these conditions were wanting to the chain of evidence. The body had not been found, and the bullet was only buried in the bark of a cypress-knee.

The blood which it had carried with it into the wood was evidence of its having first passed through living flesh—whether that of man, or animal, could not be decided.

The torn hole through the skirt of Darke's coat, connected with Clancy's gun having been found discharged, looked more like something from which a deduction could be drawn, unfavorable to the accused. Though it might also favor him, as proof of a fight between the two, and that the killing of Clancy was not a pre-meditated murder. Of this circumstance Darke had offered no explanation. After his arrest he had preserved a sullen silence, and refused to answer interrogatories.

"You're going to try me," he said, in reply to a question put by one of the sheriff's party. "Twill be time enough then to explain what appears to puzzle you."

The worst appearances against him had been his own behavior, as also that of the dog—both, to say the least, exceedingly suspicious. About the latter he had made a statement upon the ground; though it had failed to satisfy those of the searching party who were most prone to suspect him. And, now that time had elapsed,

and they had sufficiently reflected upon it, his account of the affair seemed still less like the true one. His having once chastised Clancy's dog might, naturally enough, make the animal afterward spiteful toward him. But why had this spite not been shown while they were around the cottage before setting out on the search? Why was it only made manifest, and in such earnest manner, after they had arrived under the cypress—beyond doubt the place where the dog had last looked upon his master?

Although still nothing more than circumstantial, to many of those engaged in the inquiry, this chapter of testimony appeared almost conclusive of Darke's guilt.

During the deliberations two individuals came upon the ground, who contributed an additional item of information, corroborative of this. These were Simeon Woodley and Ned Heywood. Their added testimony referred to the footprints seen by the swamp's edge. After assisting at the arrest they had proceeded thither, taking Darke's boots—which Woodley had surreptitiously secured—along with them. Like the bullet to the barrel of his gun, his boots were found to fit the tracks exactly. No others could have made those marks in the mud. So certified the two hunters, declaring their readiness to make oath of it.

It was another link in the chain of circumstantial evidence, still further strengthening the case against the accused.

As these facts were brought forward, one after another, the group of deliberators seemed gradually subsiding into a fixed belief, likely soon to end in action—that sort usually taken by the executive officers of "Justice Lynch."

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